





THE LIBRARY  
OF  
THE UNIVERSITY  
OF CALIFORNIA  
LOS ANGELES

26.5 1100.00  
3.4  
796  
2050  
1755

UNIVERSITY of CALIFORNIA  
AT  
LOS ANGELES  
LIBRARY

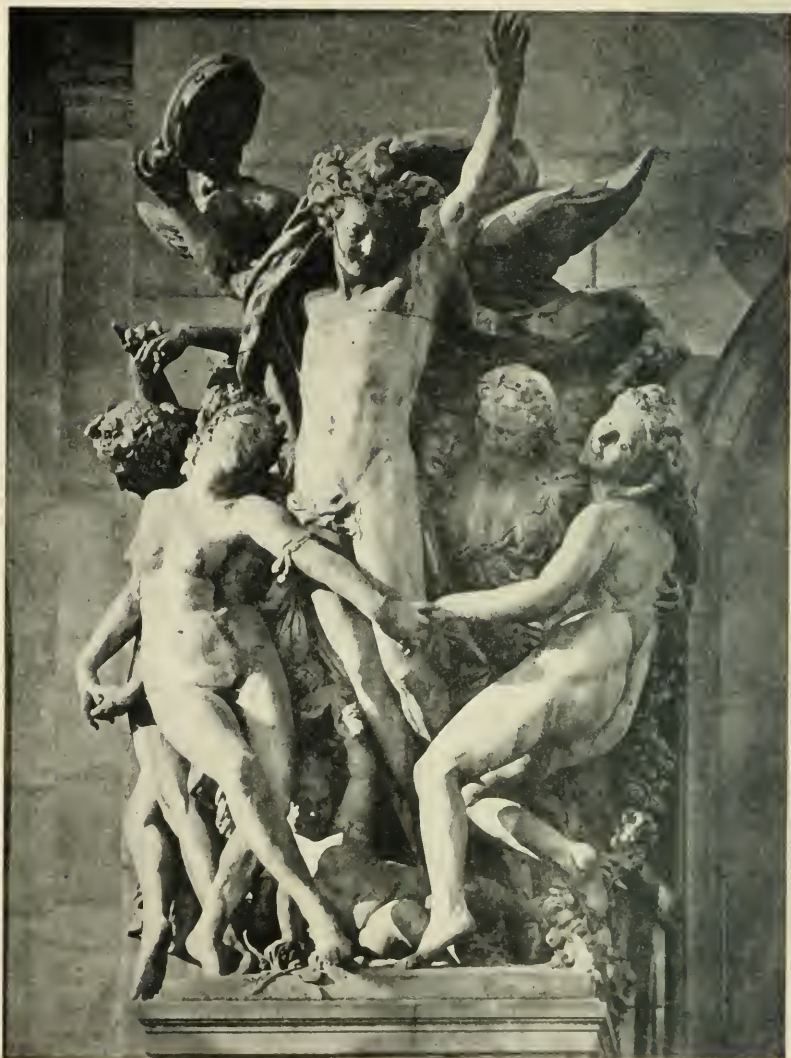






Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2008 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation





*The Dance, by Carpeaux*

THE CONCEPTION OF ART



# THE CONCEPTION OF ART

## HENRY CARPEAUX "THE DANCE" BY CARPEAUX

The author knows of no work of plastic art which more fully than this defines Art itself.

Because of this it has always contained for him a charm beyond that of its subject, its composition, or excellence of technique.

Here stands Apollo, genius of Art, exciting through music the rhythmic activity of a kindred art, two of the most primitive forms of artistic expression thus revealing their natural kinship, music and dancing.

But the genius of Art does more; he not only fuses one art with another, he raises each to its highest quality by his own inspiration. It is this emotional elation which clearly affects the result that delights him. One can see the master as easily frown as smile, and, doubtless before a true harmony of action came to possess the group, he gave vent to as much pain at the failure of Art, as pleasure at that which now through its perfection delights him.

Each one, a necessary element of the completed circle, has learned to perform her part, which at length has become an intuitive expression. The training to accomplish this has been forgotten, and the art of it therefore, a pure delight to both the beholden and the beholder.

ILLUSTRATED

H. F. YOUNG'S BOOKS  
NEW YORK, 1911  
THE UNIVERSITY BOOK

51287

## THE DANCE OF CARIBBEAN

The author knows of no work of plastic art which more fully than this depicts Art itself.

Elements of this art are contained for him in a form beyond that of its subject, its composition, or execution of its design.

It is a state of mind of Art, exciting through the rhythmic activity of a kindred art two of the most primitive elements of expression that revealing their nature in the same act of expression.

But the genius of Art does not; he not only faces one art with another, he rises each to its highest quality by his own imagination. It is this individual relation which really affects the result that delights him. One can see the result as easily from a single and doubtful before a true harmony of action can be possessed the group be brought out as such from the relation of Art, a pleasure of that which now through its perfection reveals him.

Each one a necessary element of the completed circle, has learned to perform for part, which in length has become an intuitive expression. The training to accomplish this has been forgotten, and the art of it therefore, a pure delight to both the painter and the beholder.

# THE CONCEPTION OF ART

By

HENRY RANKIN POORE

*Author of "Pictorial Composition, and the Critical  
Judgment of Pictures," and "The Pictorial Figure"*



*SECOND EDITION, REVISED*

*ILLUSTRATED*

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS  
NEW YORK AND LONDON  
The Knickerbocker Press

41287

*Copyright, 1913, by*

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

*All rights reserved, including that of  
translation into foreign languages*

The Knickerbocker Press, New York

14293

7425  
P 74 c

TO MY WIFE  
KATHARINE STEVENS POORE

THIS PERSONAL CONCEPTION OF ART IS DEDICATED  
AS A SLIGHT ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THOSE COUNT-  
LESS OBLIGATIONS WHICH UNCONSCIOUSLY ACCUMU-  
LATE IN FAVOR OF THE ARTIST'S WIFE AGAINST  
THE ARTIST HUSBAND.

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

*A volume containing in condensed form a painter's opinion of the meaning of art in its application to past and present periods. It is a book addressed in the simple phrases of ready discourse to the layman and student of art, and seeks to clarify to such minds much that for want of explanation or argument has assumed an aspect of mystery and speculation.*

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
Introduction . . . . .	XI
I. Definition . . . . .	3
II. The Logic of Art . . . . .	25
III. Philosophic Conceptions . . . . .	39
IV. Past Theories and Popular Mis- conceptions . . . . .	50
V. Realism and Idealism . . . . .	79
VI. Individual Expression . . . . .	89
VII. Tolstoy and Delsarte . . . . .	94
VIII. Body, Soul, and Spirit . . . . .	112
IX. The Genesis of Art . . . . .	122
X. The <i>Æsthetics</i> of Chinese and Japanese Art . . . . .	135
XI. Conception of Painting . . . . .	152
XII. Later Tendencies—Post Impres- sionism — Matisse and Picasso . . . . .	165
XIII. Futurism—The Final Develop- ment . . . . .	206
XIV. Conclusion . . . . .	217





## ILLUSTRATIONS

The Dance . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
Effort of Scientific Intention, the purpose of which is Record or Acquisition of Knowledge . . . . .	16
Effort conscious of an added quality. Application of form to Æsthetic Purpose . . . . .	17
Ancient Symbolism — man associated with attributes of varied significance . . . . .	32
The Extremes of Modern Symbolism: Objective and Subjective . . . . .	33
Platonic Idealism: Sculpture . . . . .	48
Platonic Idealism: Painting . . . . .	49
Works expressive of Universal Ideas (mistakenly called Idealism) . . . . .	64
Allegory. The presentation of an Imaginative Idea . . . . .	65
Allegory of Universal Ideas. . . . .	84
Allegory of History — Figurative presentation of Fact . . . . .	85
Realism — varied types — Painting . . . . .	92
Realism — Sculpture . . . . .	93
Neoclassic Painting . . . . .	96
Romantic Painting . . . . .	97
Hindu and Chinese Art . . . . .	112
Japanese Art — Pictorial, Decorative. . . . .	113
Modern Japanese Painting. . . . .	116

## ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
Western Influence in Japanese Art . . .	117
Western Influence in Japanese Sculpture . . .	124
Japanese Influence in Occidental Art . . .	125
The Japanese subject by the Westerner . . .	128
Expressive Line, Japanese . . . . .	129
Expressive Line, Occidental . . . . .	144
Influence of Decoration on Illustration . . .	145
Poster Art . . . . .	148
Decorative Landscape. The subject seen with reference to its possibilities of line, spots and spaces . . . . .	149
Figure Painting influenced by Decoration . . .	156
Decorative Sculpture . . . . .	157
Impressionism . . . . .	160
Post Impressionism: Primitivism and Elementalism . . . . .	161
Post Impressionism concerned with Rhythmic Line, Design and Primitive Expression. . . . .	176
Post Impressionistic Sculpture . . . . .	177
Varied Examples of Post Impressionism . . .	192
Cubism . . . . .	193
Futurism . . . . .	208
Retrospection . . . . .	209

## INTRODUCTION

A CONCEPTION of art should best come to us through a long perspective, for although a knowledge of it may be had by observation of what is about us and such a definition formulated as may fit our time, it is reasonable to assume that our understanding of art to-day is an evolution out of the past no less than is our painting and sculpture and music.

The point of view of yesterday is interesting not alone because it is history and forms a part of a few philosophic systems, but because of its assistance toward a true appreciation of the several periods of art which have preceded our own.

The story of art's philosophy and art's practice, however, may show evidence that the two often failed to connect, the theories formulated for the governance of art's expression and purpose being occasionally neglected by the artist in the former time no less than in the present.

That the theorist and artist are often so busy, each with his own vision, as to fail of seeing the other man's in its real proportions, has no better exemplification than in the practical and inoffensive copartnership of Turner and Ruskin.

## INTRODUCTION

With the author's conclusions in æsthetics quite at variance with some of these writers, the reader may judge of his delight in finding by accident one out of their number who agreed with him. Sir William Armstrong in his introduction to his life of Gainsborough has produced a short tract on art so filled with modern thought and logic, so clear in its conclusions and convincing in the development of his theory, that one regrets its association with a biography which cripples it in the far-reaching good that a separate brochure would have secured. It was as though he had it so thoroughly developed in his system that at the moment he launched it, there seeming no other vent.

In Chapter III enough is quoted from it to prove what an exhilarating breeze of thought it is, blowing life and freshness into ~~the~~ ~~pages~~ and overturning without effort the formulas with which they have hedged in the subject of art. When he says "a certain small group of writers is uncomfortably conscious that the very *materials of art* have intrinsic powers of expression," he brings his argument to the practical point with which this book and its sequel, "The Constructive Principles of Art," are much concerned. Perhaps he has meanwhile taken up his studies here; if so, the writer can have no more earnest hope than that they tally with the conclusions which are made in these pages.

Nor was it any less a pleasure to find corroboration for my division of the work of art into Body, Soul, and Spirit, and the Trinity

## INTRODUCTION

which was the outgrowth of these, in that Del-sarte, after fifteen years' study of Greek art, asserted with enthusiasm that he had discovered this to be the basis of not only *their* art but of *all art*.

As to the point made against the special sense by which beauty is apprehended, advanced by Kant, I may here say that I appreciate the fact that a liking may be had without a reason for it, and doubtless most art appreciation of the public is had in this wise, merely knowing what one likes, like the child, without knowing why.

The need to dignify this state of mental inactivity by supplying it with a name, as an added sense, becomes less apparent as the science of æsthetics develops, and which now can be regarded only as an accommodation which those affecting art should outgrow.

Every one who confronts a work of art forms an opinion, and few deny themselves an expression of it. This opinion is usually based on some familiar notion concerning art in general, by which it is measured. One cannot talk long with a layman upon the subject of art before knowing what his determining idea is.

Before one is qualified to become a critic in even a casual degree he should at least be able to define that branch of human endeavor upon which an opinion is expressed. It is safe to say that from educated people a satisfactory definition of art would be less easily obtained than one for any other human product.

For a number of years the writer presented

## INTRODUCTION

the simple question, "What is art?" before large classes of art students, and found it was a poser. No responses were made that covered the case of art, but such only as applied to the branch of painting, the reasons behind mere technical production being apparently unthought of, or that the term art included both literature and music.

That the thing "looks like," or not, is our first criterion of judgment, and for many this remains the sum and substance of a critical attitude toward painting and sculpture.

Let us first call to mind, therefore, that there are a great many kinds of art. In fact art plays so large a part in our life, entering into it through so many different channels, that it is surprising its principles are not taught in the schools. One might at least suppose that art would be taught in art schools, but this is not necessarily the case. It depends upon the school. Within a short time the art school was merely a place where drawing and painting were taught, and the entire emphasis laid upon that; and twenty years ago it was possible to take a two or three years' course in the best schools of the country and hear nothing save of the technique of drawing and painting.

That the school of art should do more than this is not taxing it with an unreasonable demand. To lay before the student the possibilities and limitations of his profession, asking him to choose his manner of expression with a knowledge of the philosophy and the science which must control both it and him is to make

## INTRODUCTION

him a thinker at the start instead of the unquestioning follower of a teacher who naturally offers him his personal creed.

In casting a definition which should be broad enough to apply to all of the fine arts it was necessary to abandon the epigram "art is form," and this for two reasons. That it weakens under scrutiny is obvious when form is found to be both good and bad; much form is therefore unavailable as a basis for art, and we would become involved in such trouble as beset Tolstoy and necessitated his deciding what was good and what not. And again, though art is expressed in qualified form in literature, painting, sculpture, and architecture, we must avoid this term when we come to an important phase of music and select a broader term, for we cannot speak of the form of a tone, and the difference between musical art and musical effort is a matter of quality at this point.

Realizing that quality is the identification of essential character we must accept it as the larger term, regulative not alone of the attributes of a subject but also of conception.





**THE CONCEPTION OF ART**



*Handwritten note:* Quality is the essential character

## CHAPTER I

### DEFINITION

A WORK of fine art<sup>1</sup> results when man expresses the quality of whatever he designs for his aesthetic and intellectual pleasure.

Quality signifies essential character.

Art is the expression of the essential character of a subject.

An appeal to the intellect or the æsthetic sense becomes pleasurable in that degree<sup>2</sup> in which its quality has been realized.

Fact is fixed, positive, determinate. Quality is potential and awaits our apprehension and development. The fact exists of itself and needs no revealing: the quality must belong to the thing as inherent and becomes influential as a nucleus for growth. The method for this identification of the nature of a subject is the artists' study.

<sup>1</sup>"Art is the power of doing something which is not taught by Nature or by instinct." Dr. Johnson.

"Art is but the employment of the powers of Nature for an end." John Stuart Mill.

"Yes," says the *Edinburg Review*, "but the employment is the art. That use or employment of the natural elements is precisely the function of the intelligence and will, which differs from nature in its proper sense as the active differs from the passive."

The conclusion of Mr. Bergson is that art is the revelation of the individuality of things.

<sup>2</sup>Herein is presented a simple basis for criticism. Has the artist found the essential character? Does the work express quality?

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

Here then is the difference between art and that upon which art acts, between art and the object which she may influence. The reporter brings in a plain statement of fact; the editor may reconstruct its style so that its form seems goodly and delights us by a sensation apart from the fact; the poet sees in it a greater opportunity and raises again the quality of its form. The fact under each hand remains unchanged, but meanwhile it has passed through two degrees of art.

“What,” said Goethe, “is the use of poets if they but repeat the record of historians?” And what can be the use of art of any sort if, as a means, it does not raise its subject through varying degrees of quality to perfection? He of the limited voice may gain favor by the superior quality of interpretation, through a particular heed to such principles as develop *quality*.

How, if not an act of art production<sup>1</sup> shall we designate the substitution of one word for a better, the change in the tone of a color, the reconstruction of a line, the refinement of a musical passage, in each case an effort to approach closer to the essence of the conception through an advance in quality.

There is objective quality of form, color, tone,

<sup>1</sup>In its etymology art signifies a begetting or creation. The discussion in this volume is confined to the *fine* arts, its definition applying to them only. The widest classification obtainable, however, sets everything, outside of nature, into the class either of science or art, and the distinction between the fine and the useful arts is that the former are created to please, while the latter govern man's skill in the utilities.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

and construction. There is likewise *subjective* quality of conception.

Quality, for those who must have an explicit and practical gauge for their measurements of value, becomes the little weight which they may push upon the graduated arm of the scale until it covers all the attributes to be weighed. The greatest works in painting are perforce those registering the greatest amount of quality in each of the essentials, drawing, color, tone, conception. Meissonier had the first in excess, but his tone was accidental and his color uninspired.

By comparison the quality of Millet's drawing was subjective rather than objective, and in its own order quite as good, while in tone and color he was the other's superior. Time has found this out, and the little quality gauge may be pushed farther in the case of the one than the other. The illustration is more ingenuous than elegant, but its homely simplicity contains undeniable truth.<sup>1</sup>

The vast majority of us, following the philosophical thought of the past, have construed art into being a product or at least an "activity," and demand definition of these things. That

<sup>1</sup>In the painter's art the quality of color and tone has ever outweighed that of form or drawing. This has been the world's judgment.

It is for this reason that in time the scale of value always turns toward the painter who shows quality as a colorist. The judgment of the ages decides in favor of the Venetian School as against the Romanesque or Umbrian; and from this period down we may notice that natural preference has persisted in showing this discrimination.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

it is neither of these, but rather the endowment of these products and activities by essential qualities, is the proposition of this thesis.

This distinction was made clear with never-to-be-forgotten force some years ago when at one of the theatres of Paris a group of the actors and singers of the French metropolis appeared for charity. Among the number was one amateur who sang in a subdued chamber voice and scarcely filled the auditorium. He proved a distinct disappointment to the audience until they learned the capacity of his voice, and, this settled, they were then prepared to pay heed to the quality of his performance. As the song proceeded, the exquisite taste and judgment in the use of that limited capacity, the modulation, the fervor, the reserve, the precise articulation had produced such an impression that the singer received an ovation greater than that of any other of the rare company. By comparison, other voices were fuller, of greater register and efficiency as instruments of sound; the material in each case was there, the music as written and the voice of interpretation, but by unanimous consent the palm was awarded not to those things, but rather to the manner of their setting forth, the form in which they were used; in short, for the quality of their expression: this then became the essence of the art and the basis for its appraisal.

Instead of art being an expression of the beautiful, a thinker has declared it to be only a beautiful expression, and thus made an advance in the comprehensibility of the sub-

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

ject. The beautiful has long been regarded the necessary "objective" upon which the artist acts. The first ceremony then to the processes of most philosophic thought from Plato to Rodin is the act of baptism of the object into the kingdom of the beautiful, after which its artistic salvation is undertaken.

So insistent was the Greek mind for the beautiful object in art that the Thebans created a law which provided that if ugliness of subject were essayed the artist should redeem it by making it more beautiful than nature had left it.

Rodin, in the latest pronouncement upon this subject, falls in with the ancient idea that art is the expression of the beautiful, and defends the realism of his "Old Courtesan" (a woman of eighty in the nude) by declaring that all nature is beautiful, a proposition which, with its illustration, practically denies the existence of the ugly. If, however, all nature is beautiful, and art's business is the expression of the beautiful, then anything in nature is a fit subject for art, a proposition which eliminates selection and, furthermore, reduces art to the level of plenary imitation. It is, however, no tenet of realism that all nature is beautiful; rather is it the boast and pride of the average realist of both literature and the visual arts that realism conveys them to the haunts of the ugly, and their justification of its application to art is the standpoint of Ruskin, who taught that art was the closest expression of nature. Rodin's preference to be a classic and old-

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

fashioned in his philosophy possesses that grim nobility of mind in its contemplation of God's creation, accepting it as right, that it hails our respect at least from the viewpoint of its simple reverence. Realism can have no ideals, since all is good. Realism and Stoicism clasp hands adown the highway, making the best of things. They do not stray afield, they climb no heights for the far view, they see no visions. They are content with creation as it is, and whatever idea their art would convey is consigned in simple trust to nature for its conveyance.

### I

The production may please the senses and not be art of any valued degrees, but if it please the intelligence it has passed the true sentry in charge of the countersign. The child is delighted with the pictures and music created for his æsthetic sense. The savage takes delight in his pictured art and music. But neither of these pleases us. Pleasure therefore becomes a test of art, but not the criterion. Art's criterion rests on taste, and taste is founded on universal education. This distinction impugns the theory of Professor Von Richard Kralik, who presumes that art springs from the five senses. He therefore treats seriously the art of the sense of touch and taste and smell as well as the art of the sense of sight and hearing. An address made to the sight and hearing is conveyed to the intelligence, where enjoyment is consummated; but



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

that which appeals to the sense of touch,<sup>1</sup> of smelling and tasting merely, affects the senses *directly* and establishes no intellectual pleasure. This fact — namely, that the sensations from the three remaining senses are not delegated to the intelligence — excludes them from art impression and incidentally proves that the sensations produced by works of art aspire to the intelligence and are but rarely limited to a “sense” of beauty.

The “sense of beauty” has come into recognized currency as a convenient term, still used by some modern writers of art. The senses are five, and they still continue to respond to all necessary demands. To my own mind and that of many another artist the question arises, why make mysterious the principles of art: creating an added sense, when we may carry the sensations which are at the seat of emotion, together with the mechanical methods which exploit them, straight to the intelligence and know the basis for the pleasure they produce? In the sequel to this book, “The Constructive Principles of Art,” the basis of what is here denominated “æsthetic pleasure,” is discussed.

The above definition of art is inclusive of many subjects which are popularly not included in the art category and is exclusive of certain ones which are thus popularly included.

## II

There are certain subjects denominated as art which merely contain some art; there are

<sup>1</sup>We must however except touch to the sculptor and potter which for them may give intellectual pleasure.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

others which contain less; there are a few which are altogether art. Instead therefore of dividing the products of human creation into subjects which are art or not art, a more reasonable and clarifying designation would be art, and subjects containing art; or, more particularly, Pure Art and Some Art. The definition of art kept in mind would quickly set the subjects into their categories. The uncritical habit of man, who has for generations used this term *art* without being able to define it, and having only in a very general way a notion of what it means, has furnished him with objections to accepting a conception of it which upsets his vague and indefensible usage.

The writer's hypothesis that art is addressed to the intelligence, though seemingly to the æsthetic sense, not only paves the way for its intellectual analysis, but incidentally safeguards its foundation from varying degree of taste. The art of the savage or barbarian, that which pleases him as decoration, imagery, or music, delight his fancy merely. Noble, dignified, and transcendental art would either not please him at all, or, if it did, would do so only when apprehended by his awakened intelligence. It is because this faculty is required in the apprehension of art that the barbarian of this or other lands can take no pleasure in it.

Says the critic of the *Saturday Review* (London): "The laws by which beauty may become enmeshed become in the same age hostile from man to man, and in the same man are hostile from man in his nonage to man who has ed-

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

uated his sensibilities." This supports the writer's contention that in making its address to the intelligence art becomes more and more plain as the intelligence of man arises toward it.

No better argument for adding intelligence to intuition in the production of art may be supplied than the writing of Gertrude Stein, who is a product of the Post Impressionistic movement. These amazing cycles of repetitious commonplaces are the result of emptying the mind of all ideas and then putting to paper such thoughts as the intuitions supply without aid of the intelligence.

In reducing art to its simplest form, that of easiest comprehension for the child either of years or in mental growth, Tolstoy would seem to degrade art to the low level of accommodation instead of raising it to the high level of intelligent appreciation. He therefore is obliged to dismiss on this basis many of the world's masterpieces in painting, music, and literature as above and beyond universal appreciation.

The analysis of any work for the art contained in it is the same process that we apply in chemistry. It will show such a per cent. of art as specimens of quartz will expose here and there glints of gold; or, by contrast, the whole as a nugget is pronounced pure. Calling a work which contains some art, a work of art, is as uncategorical as to designate as gold a specimen of quartz containing some of that metal. Herein lies the complication now arising in poetry which is a combination of art and

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

non-art, a question taken up more fully later on.

There is no small per cent. that goes for art in poetry, music, and painting which is justified as such through its environment. There are the unmusical passages where the composer seems at sea, drawing us after him in our faith that he will yet speak again, much of which is unjustified on the principle of contrast, arrest, or discord, with the purpose of creating a greater vitality in what ensues. There are the prolonged commonplaces in prose and oratory which we endure while waiting the lightning flash. There are many surfaces of accessory and minor parts in painting and sculpture which are devoid of "quality." There is, finally, the one good spot in the work of the beginner which is frequently as good as a master could make it. In all this the gold merely suffers from the dross, but in our estimate of the whole we judge it to be either one or the other, a conclusion rendered on the philosophic postulate of identity. In such criticism the question of what proportion of art to non-art one may accept and call the product art, or what amount of real art may exist and by virtue of the taint be condemned as non-art, is settled as purely a matter of taste. This attitude is essential for the practical one to whom art shall be pleasure, for the product must be judged and accepted as an entity; but to the student it is of great importance that the work shall be analyzed for its *dross and its gold*.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

It is by such process that the labor of purification culminates, and in his own case he may in time put his work out of one class and into another. The true conception of art, then, the writer holds to be an acknowledgment of pleasure which may come spontaneously on viewing or hearing a creative work, which pleasure may be justified, qualified, or destroyed as it is later reviewed by the intelligence for the expression of those vital principles on which art must rest, productive as they are of the quality which determines artistic value. The ease with which pseudo-art may please the majority of mankind would indeed make pleasure therein a flimsy and worthless test of it, unassisted by a faculty with which the worth of the test might be gauged.

### III

Business, science, and religion are founded on truth, and when they remove themselves from it they fail. Art has likewise its alleged foundation in truth, but its first mission being to please, truth is forced to become elastic, to be turned, twisted, manipulated, cajoled, threatened, outraged — all this merely that man may keep on being pleased.

But man is no such tyrant that for a holiday he could wish Truth murdered; no, she always escapes, or if not, man finds that together with her he has killed Art also.

If man were not of this sort and his mental processes merely reasonable and mechanical,

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

one form of graphic presentation would suit him for all time.

But from the cradle to the grave man keeps on outgrowing his toys. This demand for change must therefore be recognized in his pleasures. In art he is constantly craving it, and the pleasure demand in art and the truth demand by the makers of art creeds will later on be placed before the reader.

Let art be judged (and classified) by her intentions.

All art, then, is divided into three classes: that which is created as decorative, that which is created for the expression of an idea, that which is purely imitative and is created solely as an expression of reality. In each case the ultimate effort of the artist is pleasure, his own and that of others. While these three great divisions may be clearly traced, so positively as to leave no doubt of a first intention, the majority of art as clearly proves that with the opportunity apparent for including in the same work the qualities of two, if not three of these divisions, the artist has reached out in favoring caress or positive adaptation of them.

It is only at the beginning and at the (present) end of art that emphasis is laid on but a single one of these points of view.

In what may be called art's inception, when the cave man made use of his crude ability to trace a form, the intention was purely realistic. His sole effort was to make his record as like the object as possible, and at this point he rested. He had no thought of beauty, and

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

æsthetics was as valueless as finger bowls or a floral centrepiece in his daily life. Without significance of mental pleasure his effort was compassed by the sensation of mental satisfaction. He was therefore no more an artist than the child, who, in the same scientific spirit, makes a drawing of a parent or playmate or depicts, out of the realm of his fancy, a likeness of something of which he has heard. The visual language to the child of the stone age or of the nursery is no more nor less than to him of the workshop who finds it easier to call for a pencil when description fails, and says, "Well, it is something like this."

The parent declares: "This drawing by Willie gives me great pleasure; I am immensely pleased with it." Oh, fond parent, cannot you see that the reason of your pleasure in this effort is entirely a sentimental one? It is because you suddenly realize that your boy is using a language of his own which you had not taught him, and has amused and interested you, as did his efforts at getting up from his knees, standing unaided, and making a step. This bit of scientific exposition, this proof that he has observed and is able to chronicle his observation, must not be interpreted as art, but as his other means of describing a natural fact.

Thus far he has observed that the head sets on the neck, the neck on the shoulders, and the body on the trunk, but he has not observed the relationship of size in either features or body. The drawing by Rodin page (16) is in like measure scientific data. To call this art would

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

be equivalent to declaring that the "notes" of the speaker were literary art. But lest even this be asserted as a privilege in the present state of the philosophic atmosphere, we may take Rodin's own assertion as proof that this is not art, for to Rodin art is "*servile imitation.*" In the sketch of the nude model there is no servility and but meagre imitation. It is, in short, but a passing reminder of human action.

But as to the effort which is more than this, and which sets out to *imitate* the object, the careful drawing of the model, is not this art? On the contrary, this is still science. This is clearly inspired by the demands of science to *know*, and the student labors faithfully under this demand. "Art only begins with the liberty of the artist, as flight only begins with the liberty of the bird." "The law of relativity," says Hamerton, "governs everything in the world of art. To exercise the great art faculty is to extract the power from these relations; and the copyism of objects in isolated studies does not exercise the high art faculty at all. Goethe perceived this long since. He perceived that the effect of everything depends on its surroundings, and that to detach and isolate is to destroy."

To persist in the inquiry, however, what shall be said of the plastic study of the student of sculpture? This is isolated and is likely to turn out as well as some of the things which, dignified by the term art, find a place at the exhibitions. Isolation does not impair the



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

quality of the Venus de Milo, nor the portrait of Augustus.

Here, then, is the point where the wording of the writer's definition finds partial justification. If art were a *something* which was made for our intellectual (æsthetic) pleasure, then the thing itself thus pleasing us would be art. Instead, however, the contention is that it is not *the thing* but the *quality* in the thing, and this becomes that subtle and sensitive line of demarcation which qualifies or disqualifies. If the work, undertaken under the scientific endeavor of the seeker for knowledge, appeals to his intelligence or to that of another, with a delight distinctly apart from the joy of accomplishment or satisfaction in its skill, the work thereby crosses the line into the realm of art, though this was not its goal.

Here, then, is established that line of separation varied and changeable as the shore line of a continent. There never was a straight line serving this purpose; it is a line strangely inclusive and as strangely exclusive. It invades the schoolroom and encloses the modest performance of a questioning student and leaves upon the shoals the creations of empty confidence in the gallery. It furthermore frequently overlaps parts of the same work, including these and rejecting the remainder of the work. Art, in short, announces itself to be a regulative force applied to the form and expression of man's intellectual pleasures.

The pure arts are those which conform strictly to the broad definition of art. Produced for

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

man's æsthetic and intellectual pleasure, the following may be admitted as "pure": music, decorative design, including all patterns for adornment whose intrinsic mission is to please; landscape gardening, window dressing, the plan for the city beautiful, all ornament for utensils, for architecture or personal adornment, dancing, and all forms of exercise giving pleasure to the beholder through its design, painting and sculpture, the effect from which is pleasure apart from any idea which may be contained. Pure art, therefore, supposedly addresses the primitive faculties of sensation; but as the mistress whose first appeal has been a simple loveliness of form and feature may add thereto the fascination of wit, and later the deeper charm of soul, so in its development under the hand either of intelligent craftsmanship or alert appreciation this creature of simple beauty may become intellectually companionable and in time the revealer for us of those deeper delights which lay hold on eternity. Art, whose first intention was an address to the senses, may become at length a source of ideas and through them an inspiration.

### IV

When art moves from this simple precinct she takes on phases which are either associated ones or by-products of art.

Most architecture is therefore not pure art, but rather scientific construction. The art contained is added to this science either as a design

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

or its adornment. We may view the structure exteriorly and conclude it gives us pleasure. We enter to find rooms for living, halls for entrance and exit arranged for man's convenience. The art in architecture is discovered in the æsthetic adaptation of spaces and elevations and in the beautifying of *essential requirements*. Art, therefore, is the handmaid of architecture, and not basal. The proportions of the building, — i. e., its relation of line to line, or line to mass — is governed by certain principles of æsthetics, and the building as a subject may thereby become a subject for art expression in its conception, but the fact that much building exists and fully conserves its purpose without in anywise giving expression to these possibilities in æsthetics proves that architecture may survive and proceed without them. It may be said, however, that there is no subject which offers a worthier opportunity for the expression of art's principles than architecture. The cases wherein architecture is entirely art are rare monuments to art's true definition. Architecture is a utility, the architect being more deeply exercised over his problem of habitation and its requirements than with the inexorable demands of proportion, space, and balance, or with decoration and its pleasures.

The inclusion in a scheme of art of rudimentary or temple architecture such as the Celtic monuments or the Dolmen of Poitiers, where great slabs are supported by upright stones, even though these were inspired by

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

creative emotion, is to leave the true line of art in our quest by overlooking its great essential. These early examples of architecture, though not made for utilitarian purposes, were set up as memorials or temples for the deities, embodying a notion of reverence and worship, and do not include any demand for beauty. That later such architecture was discovered to present opportunity for the expression of the beautiful, and that the opportunity in time developed San Marco and the Taj Mahal, in which one finds those qualities which excite man's æsthetic and intellectual pleasure, leaves architecture still knocking for admittance as a pure art.

Neither as a utility or as a work of supererogation can architecture lay claim to a place in art's genesis. Yet with many minds architecture is assumed as the parent of the arts.

If, however, we are to apply the contention of Fichte and others of his school that art is an expression of a beautiful soul in its effort at self-expression, an admission would follow toward a few architects who exercise this faculty of soul-loveliness and express themselves in disregard of the demands of the ultimate tenant and with the avowed purpose only of having the beholder exclaim, "How beautiful." But why should architecture crave the stamp of a "pure" art? Her great service as a utility is to prove that utilities may be made beautiful, and in this she becomes the parent of a long and increasing progeny. In Art's record of national thought, as mirrored in her divers

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

works the world round, in painting, in sculpture, and architecture, the latter's expressions probably give forth more of the timbre of a people's life, becoming more of an exponent of its philosophy, its politics, its struggles, its ideals than may be discovered in the other two.

### V

Language, like architecture, responds to Art's *réveillon* and awakes to the widest capacity of influence obtainable between man and man. Communication, written or verbal, may exist among people throughout a lifetime without the discovery that they have been using a soil which not only produces wheat, potatoes, and cabbages, but roses, lilies, and palms. The Garden of Allah springs from the desert as a surprise *which was designed*.

Language, oral or written, becomes art or artistic in degree as it attracts our judgment for its completeness and fitness of expression. It must charm by its form. The words which we know as everyday currency in everyday service must be so placed as to become, as Coleridge declares, *the best words in the best order*. The result is, therefore, art, either of poetry or prose; and language is turned into art no less in the one than the other.

Applying the definition of art to dancing, it is found to be a pure art in that its contemplation gives pleasure in the balanced and fitting association of its parts. Its purpose is entirely to please. We cannot, however, speak of a

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

game of football or baseball as art, except from the viewpoint of our pleasure in following the wonderful variety in unity, as part joins with part in balanced and fitting association. This much is artistic, but the game fails of being a work of art because, though all its elements may be present, it does not become a creation of some controlling mind, such for instance as does the formal dance.

Music springs into being so spontaneously, as not only an expression of emotional pleasure on the part of its creator, but likewise for the pleasure of others, that it takes rank as the purest of the arts.]

In this connection let us emphasize our definition.

Art is the expression of that quality in creative work which arouses æsthetic and intellectual pleasure.

Art is creative, having for its purpose to give pleasure; not an<sup>1</sup> "activity" nor an "achievement," so, unless the would-be artist is a creator, he does not qualify. Therefore, the artisan in working out a beautiful thing from the master's design is not an artist; nor the musician who with masterly activity interprets the composer's thought; not until any of these, so closely in touch with the principles and practice of art, actually creates it, can he truly be called an artist. Yet the constant proximity to the creative thought and technical expression of any art in numerous cases stimulates creation, and most interpreters of musical art have to

<sup>1</sup>Tolstoy.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

their credit the impromptu or written score of some melodic inspiration on which they "qualify." At the same time, the musician in his interpretation makes use of every principle of art, which under his hand may attain a power never conceived by the composer himself.

Beholding an opportunity in the motif of a score he may raise the degree of the latent emotion contained in it by the quality of those art principles therein discerned and which he exercises in their highest degree, leaving the original conception gasping at its unknown potency.

By this ability the distinction between the artisan who merely chips away the marble as he follows the sculptor's cast model and in time is able to present the master's concept to the world, and the musician with his personal emotional range of interpretation, takes each one his place, in widely distinctive classes.

Just here arises the case, fine drawn, of the actor versus the interpreter of music; for although the former interprets the thought of another he sets before us a visible creation, himself. Just as the painter or sculptor takes a man and makes him into art, so does the actor use himself with his component parts, which we find him working into a unified creation. It is no longer McCreedy, or Booth, or Terry that we see, but Iago, Hamlet, and Rosalind, and these creations have good title to their signatures.

Although the art in all painting and sculpture is that part only which gives pleasure,

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

pleasure from its construction or technique, or that gratification which follows the rendition of character, still to that as the essential art part of the work is naturally allied another capacity — namely, the expressing of an idea, illustrative, didactic, emotional, argumentative, moral, patriotic, or religious. So easily does art do this that early writers supposed this was art's business, whereas her only real duty is to please. So capable is she with these latter opportunities that from the moralist with his precept or the editor with his story to the advertiser with his wares is a long procession ready to employ her. The newspaper acknowledges that the strongest and most direct arguments in the political campaign are made by the cartoonist, and not the editor. Her power for good or evil in the field of ethics is incalculable, the sublime heights of patriotism are reached no less by the art of eloquence than by the symbolism of the painted or sculptured appeal, and the benign influence infecting the devotee of religion, whether he kneels at the wayside shrine or in the vaulted cathedral and looks reverently into the face of the Madonna, plays so large a part in the effect which is to be produced in each that art, *as to its associated idea*, assumes giant proportions.

So great was art conceded to be from these associated possibilities that in numerous philosophies the possibility was strangely confused with the parent idea.



## CHAPTER II

### THE LOGIC OF ART

“There is no expedient to which man will not resort to evade the real labor of thinking.” — *Sir Joshua Reynolds.*

ART must be logical; in short, art is the logic of form.<sup>1</sup> The processes of logic invariably give intellectual pleasure. Art's chief purpose is also to give intellectual pleasure. Logic and art are each the expression of unity in the balanced and fitting association of the different parts of a subject. Art selects her materials; logic directs their form, for logic is the science of the laws of *thought*, and art is the form of that thought expressed through natural elements.

While this is true, it is not all: man may express his thought through natural elements and not produce art. It does not become art until it gives both pleasure to the mind that creates and the mind that receives it. This is its sign, and under this qualification the term intelligence should be understood to be *developed* and *normal*. Any other sort of intelligence has nothing to do with our calculation concerning art. We need not modify either the creed or definition of our art to accommodate the notion of half civilized or barbaric

<sup>1</sup>The working basis of most of the arts.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

nations, nor lower its standards to the requirements of children or the childish.

In any condition, however, there may be observed that difference in the mere doing of things on which is pivoted our art judgment.

The point is necessary to perceive, for on it depends the notion that art must be something apart from mere expression of fact, and that the difference lies in intellectual pleasure, *which may be analyzed*. The doctrine of Heine and others that "art is form" becomes the first proposition in a syllogism which is developed by Schelling in his assertion that art is the uniting of nature with reason, and strengthened by Kant, who declares that the production of art out of nature is *pure reason*.

If this be so the apprehension of a work of art created by reason is entirely the work of the intellectual apparatus and needs no particular faculty for its perception. The form, either dictated by reason when the product is created by the artist, or accepted by him because found in nature to be "fitting" in the association of its different parts, insures acceptance, which, gratified by such completeness, receives it in pleasure. True, the intuitions may substitute for the intelligence at the start, as they do with the art of children and with artists who do not plan a design but trust to luck. To all such, however, in time must come the realization that the difference in the worth and quality of their designs is based

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

upon one or more reasons, and forthwith the intelligence is set to work and discovers these.

The theory of Mr. Bergson that we act by impulse and intuition, as original forces, is but the other side of the shield. The result by either method may be found identical in its results, the good result of the good intuition proving to be in logical line with the intelligence, just as completely as the bad result from the bad intuition proves itself in conflict with the intelligence.

It is our apprehension of the intelligence, working nature into form, *which constitutes one of our pleasures in art*, and the difference between two works, let us say of painting, manufactured out of the same materials may either express on this basis the wide difference between art and no art or the lesser difference between some art and less art.

For instance: we have a number of fishes as subject to be converted into a work of painting and made worthy a frame. If these are arranged on two or three shelves one above the other, or so placed in other arrangement that there is no cohesion of parts, the work, though well executed as imitation, lacks the intelligence which creates unity as a design, and as a work of art is a failure. Let there be rearrangement in the parts so that the form-giving principles may begin to operate, and the work moves into the range of art. Let these become fully operative, and what was at first regarded as uninteresting or frankly absurd fascinates by a

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

wonderful and convincing unity. It becomes, to use the current phrase, beautiful.

But this beauty was not inherent in the subject. It did not begin to dawn until the intelligence took hold and created a design. When during the process it was neither good nor bad, but on the way toward a satisfactory arrangement of parts, our critical disappointment was not with the subject nor with the technique, but with the intelligence of the artist in its insufficient coördination of the parts of his subject, his lack of knowledge concerning art's regulative principles. The thing called beauty therefore was quite dependent upon man's intelligence, a creation based on logical procedure, directed by a demand for the highest efficiency of parts in the whole.

Adding to this interest in art yet another—namely, that of sentimental or associated ideas—we find in that likewise does our pleasure make acknowledgment to the intelligence of the artist quite as much as to the beauty in the work.

In his landscape the chord of sadness, reverie, or exultation might be struck for us, but he could not have expressed it had he not effected a mental grasp of it so that it becomes his gift to you, and when his work excites in you the deeper moral qualities of courage, reverence, devotion, sublimity and the like, it cannot be regarded by chance, but rather by design that he has uplifted you, and should you choose to deny the moral purpose in the work, you must at least give credit to the intelligence of the artist in having defended his conception from

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

falling to the level of the ridiculous when sublimity was its goal.

At this point should be mentioned the strong attempt on the part of J. J. Rousseau and Schelling to romanticize art by their effort to exalt spontaneity at the expense of rationality, to give full rein to the imagination, under the suggestion from Goethe that the imagination might be freed from reason. The spectacular break which Rousseau made with the classicists of his day is epitomized in his epigrams, "the man who thinks is a depraved animal," and "if the artist is to have logic let it be the logic of dreamland," an attitude of mind naturally forced upon one in a decaying régime of both art and letters.

The drawings and crude paintings of children, in which we take a veritable pleasure, may at the first and superficial glance be placed outside the pale of logical analysis. So far as the child is concerned, they are to him simply a blossoming, from his intuitive sense, an attempt to talk in another language than the language of words, and to this new opportunity he gives a joyous expression. At times his intuitions are pronouncedly right, as judged by a maturer standard; at other times, and more frequently, they are pronouncedly wrong and are therefore productive of worthlessness. The happy hits are quite as frequently due to a judiciously selected list of colors and to a natural love of colors which he uses daringly and usually with a feeling for harmony in the employment of the three primaries. His natural sense for

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

balance, which every person possesses in greater or lesser degree, will now and then provoke the something-or-other in the right place which happily gives a unity to the whole. At times, through mere inability of technique, the mysterious element so valuable to art is happily created. It is refreshing because devoid of all science, all formula and rule. If the attempt be an imitation in the classroom, let us say with water color, how frequently is the best result an accidental one. How, in so many of the best examples of children's aquarelles, has the happy accident been saved by the ever-watchful eye of the teacher before the determined attempt of the pupil *to attain what he was after* shall have ruined its quality. In both imaginative and realistic work, the child, in the candor of his conviction, will tell you that his picture turned out quite different from his intention. In the first instance, his seniors see in it things which he never intended, and frequently misjudge his conception; and, in the second case, what he felt to be a failure in expressing the copy before him was held up to the class as exemplifying the freedom and charm which art should possess. Accuracy, which he is taught in the other classes is a virtue, here does not seem to be rated as high as a quality clearly beyond him to comprehend. Intention seems to have scored beyond attainment. The child is bewildered and is ready to agree with Rousseau.

But years pass, and out of the old portfolio are taken the forgotten things, dated and signed.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

Following the recognition of merit is the quick calculation of age; five, six, seven, and the man muses in a reverie. He sees qualities for which he is now searching, the easy and fearless technique, the assurance of undaunted belief, the willingness to rest the case when it had passed the impulsive and emotional stage; and again he sees that quality of suggestion, the force which inheres in crude color, and the invitation toward mysticism in the opportunity for varied solutions of meaning. Then with loving and tender discrimination he sorts out two piles, he may even pause in his enthusiasm to pin one here and one there upon his wall. Some he reserves to look at another day and the rest he crumples into the waste-paper basket.

Those that have survived have each expressed certain valued principles of art — those in the basket lack them. Unknown to the childish mind were the ideas of dominance, opposition, sequence, and poise, but they followed on in the line of intuitive effort even at that early day, and when they failed to connect with the naïve attempt of childhood they missed the valuable quality. There are certain men so captivated by the ingenuous touch of childhood's art that they long to imitate it, unaware that experience has disqualified them from that for all time. Not even in their dotage could they attain this subtle and ephemeral point of view; but even so, some in their anxiety have sought to hasten this state in their attempt. A keen observer remarks: "The direct rendering

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

of an impression without giving it mental significance cannot constitute a genuine work of art. The work of children is the product of only one of the elements of art — intense perception.” This, however, may be intuitively right.

The beauty “sense,” in large degree, then, is the intelligence at work upon conclusions which give intellectual pleasure.

Let the reader test the proposition which, at variance with much that has gone before, may be misunderstood. The colorist at once demands, “What about the simple relation of several harmonious hues! Are they not beautiful, and if so are they not acknowledged by sense?”

In reality, the appreciation of certain colors or hues in combination can be scientifically explained,<sup>1</sup> becoming, as a matter of fact, corroborative of our intuitive selection. The apprehension thereof gives pleasure which, though immediate, becomes a matter to be dissected and understood by us. So, likewise, with what may be termed a beautiful concatenation of lines in a pattern. This may be scientifically explained, and reasons given why lines, meeting at certain points and at given angles, produce a unity of pattern and are therefore accounted as beautiful, productive of intellectual pleasure through such apprehension.

Indeed, it would be difficult to mention anything appealing to what has been called the æsthetic sense which is more frankly intellectual

<sup>1</sup>The theories of Chevreul, Delsarte, Ross, and others do this.



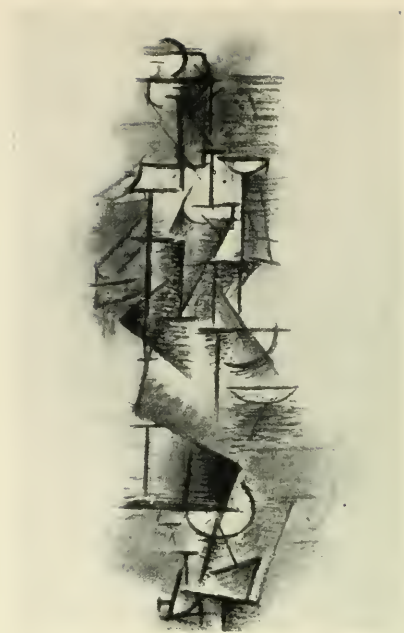


HINDU: SUPRUMANIAR AND HIS WIVES



ASSYRIAN: WINGED BULLS

ANCIENT SYMBOLISM — MAN ASSOCIATED WITH ATTRIBUTES OF VARIED SIGNIFICANCE



A WOMAN — *Picasso*



THE ANGEL OF DEATH AND THE SCULPTOR — *Dan. C. French*

THE EXTREMES OF MODERN SYMBOLISM, OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

and logical in its appeal than a fine space-filling design. With the key once discovered, the procedure from one step to another is so direct and the reason thereof so apparent that one furnished with the principles of art enjoys it quite as much as an intellectual as a sensuous pleasure.

So likewise with sound. The theory of music is reducible to a science, but at this point I am willing to admit that art's appeal is more æsthetic than intellectual, and merely remind the reader of the possibility of adding to his pleasure of intuitive apprehension the interest of *constructive knowledge*.

## II

The apprehension of pure beauty, which may appear to be an exercise above the reach of reason, depends after all upon taste, and leaves the case at any rate in the *ignus fatuus* of personal preference. Such combination of colors as is accounted beautiful to one is abhorrent to another. The music of the Chinese or the South Sea Islanders is a distress to the votaries of the modern school of opera, and conversely Wagner is doubtless as incomprehensible to the Chinese and Malay as to Tolstoy, who derided him. In the realm of absolute pure beauty, taste will always be a subverting factor in any hypothesis. When, however, we bring our attention to the intellectual apprehension of art, the question of beauty opens to analysis; and in many cases, markedly in those where

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

positive ugliness is the subject, it is found that art's demand for pleasure is satisfied wholly by the *means* of expression. If these adequately fit the character of its ugliness so that the subject is made explicitly and pronouncedly so, the intellectuality of the artist in its *discernment of character* is our pleasure. But why deceive ourselves into the supposition that the work is beautiful? Could we gaze upon Rodin's aged strumpet or MacCameron's "Absinthe Drinkers" groping in the last stages of paranoia and exclaim, "How beautiful!" Is it not time that we used terms for our ideas that express them and thereby obtain a revelation of truth? Let the ejaculation be, "How characterful!" and acknowledgment made that the means employed which technically express it are masterly and that constructively the work exploits the principles of art. These are added reasons for a sane pleasure in such works; and the three reasons of character, of technique, and construction are what qualify them as art, despite Tolstoy's contention that only such works as can show a moral basis can be considered art.

But let us push the inquiry still farther, for present art is laboring hard to escape from beauty, and ask what exclamation is befitting that grade of German and French art of latest manifestation. Here ugliness is slammed upon a pedestal with the fiat: Let it be! In neither painting nor sculpture has it any beauty that we shall desire it. Bereft of the graces of good drawing, color, or construction, we analyze it

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

to find its only quality to be *character*, and this usually enforced to caricature. If art is the expression of the beautiful, what is to be done with these? They must either be ruled out of court as not art, or the admission be made that beauty is not an essential in art.

Under the first proposition they have the defence of Taine, declaring that art demands the exaggeration of the natural character of the subject, and the clamor likewise of pres-tidigitative philosophy striving to make us see the ugly as beautiful.

If retained as art, a modification of our notion of beauty must necessarily take place.<sup>1</sup>

That beauty is the first cause of art is the confusing and confounding notion over which philosophers have wrangled from the days of Plato and Aristotle down to the last dictum by Tolstoy, who, after declaring they were all wrong, closes his argument thus: "Learned people write long cloudy treatises on art as a member of the æsthetic trinity of Beauty, Truth, and Goodness. . . . In reality, these words have no definite meaning, but hinder us in attaching any definite meaning to existing art." The contention is this: the artist does not set forth to create beauty, but rather to give expression to a thought or emotion. In moulding this in a manner which to his own mind is most effectual he falls back on certain intellectual pro-

<sup>1</sup>So brief a chapter on so vast a theme must be incomplete without shaping its conclusion toward the area of conflict between the two great philosophers of antiquity whose influence extends to the present.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

cesses expressed in the principles of art. This usually results in something which the world calls beauty, and the more skilful does his hand become in expressing his mind the more beauty does the work contain.

The "beauty" habit is bad because as a term having no definable meaning it is used to express a definite number of things, and furthermore is seldom made to submit to a limited or comparative degree.

Instead, therefore, of challenging Beauty, analyzing her, discovering wherein she may be more beautiful, in short, submitting her to the intellectual test, the habit of the centuries has been to accept her on the certificate of a "divine right," and even create for her an extra sense for her apprehension. The child in the school is asked to look at something and is told it is beautiful. He is asked to decide between several objects as to which he thinks most beautiful, but is he given reasons why one is not beautiful and never could be and also reasons why another, though beautiful, could be rendered more so? But that a "sense of beauty" is necessary to the apprehension of art is on a par in its conception with the manufacture of this "sense" under the supposition that man required it.

Let the reader for a moment glance at the field of battle upon which has been waged this warfare over beauty, and let him make a calculation as to the effort, both mental and physical, which has been required to establish, to undo, to reestablish, to revise, to limit, to

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

extend, to condemn, to defend these varying notions concerning beauty.

“Hardly,” says Schasler, “in any sphere of philosophic science can we find such divergent methods of investigation and exposition, amounting even to self-contradiction, as in the sphere of æsthetics. On the one hand, we have elegant phraseology without substance, and, on the other hand, with undeniable depths of investigation, we get revolting awkwardness of philosophical terminology. A style of exposition which expresses itself in clear and popular philosophic language can be found nowhere less frequently than in the domain of æsthetics.”

Eugène Veron, who in 1878 summed up more satisfactorily than any of his predecessors in the æsthetic field the end and aim of art, declared: “There is no science which more than æsthetics has been handed over to the reveries of metaphysicians. From Plato down to the received doctrines of the day, people have made of art a strange amalgam of fancies and transcendental mysteries which find their expression in the conception of an absolute ideal beauty.”

To confound “natural” beauty with man-made beauty exhibits poverty of analysis in a misuse of terms. Art and natural beauty are distinctly separate in their origin; the one, a creation by the Almighty, employing many standards according to the separate types of His choice, and the other the hand-made affair of man seeking in its efficiency the most complete means of expression.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

What appears that complete means to the Hindu, the Alaskan, or the Anglo-Saxon may be so disparate as to be mutually incomprehensible.

If we were to change our term of "beauty" in art for the more rational conception of *efficient expression* in art, and make acknowledgment to the standards of intelligence of the producers of art, we would find, instead of damming art's flow by countless diversions toward our own chartered course, we would give it the liberty to a right of way in its own channel.

The first cause of art was desire for expression and not the exploitation of the beautiful. As man became more critical of his expression and more insistent of its efficiency he brought to bear upon it certain principles which made his expression the more effective.

This the world has called beautiful, using for it the same term as is applied to the thing *beautiful by nature* — the form, let us say, of woman or man in its perfection — a beauty which cannot be analyzed, strive howsoever we may.



## CHAPTER III

### PHILOSOPHIC CONCEPTIONS

“Any creation of man’s intelligence may be analyzed by man’s intelligence.”

THE first writers to revise the science of æsthetics after a lapse of fifteen hundred years, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, of the English school, both held that beauty is recognized by the mind only. Hutcheson modifies this to a degree by asserting that we recognize art by “an internal sense.”<sup>1</sup>

Baumgarten was part way right in declaring that beauty was recognized by the senses — sight and hearing — a self-evident statement, but that the apprehension of art is an intellectual process was first conceived by the two English philosophers. From that point beauty falls into the hands of taste, which only can decide what is beautiful, and since taste cannot be definite, neither can beauty. This is the conclusion of Voltaire and other French writers of his day.

Winckelmann, who makes beauty the aim of art, establishes a threefold division of his subject: beauty of form, beauty of idea, and beauty of expression, the last a combination of the first two. Since then, however, art has been prov-

<sup>1</sup>Tolstoy’s “What is Art?”

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

ing that the first and second of his divisions are not essential and has paused in deliberation over the last.<sup>1</sup>

With the advent of Kant much light was turned on, for his conception of subject and object, of nature apart from man himself, and of himself, as a part of nature, was good analysis. In nature man exercises his reason for the discovery of *truth*. He adds what he considers necessary — namely, a “judging capacity,” which forms judgments without reasoning and which, he declares, is the basis of the æsthetic feeling.

Why Kant should have felt the addition a necessity is hard to understand. If the reason apprehends truth, and beauty was held to be truth, the *reason* should have been sufficient for its apprehension.

At that time it must be remembered, however, that there had been no scientific analysis of the processes of art except the rhetoric of literary art. There had been no works on constructive art, bringing it into the range of a science. Judgment without reason (which for a philosopher is a strained case of elastic accommodation) was therefore Kant's invention for what he thought to be unanalyzable. Had he turned his perceptive analysis into art at this point his *Urteilkraft* (judgment without reason) would not have played the part of a rag doll in place of a living and breathing thing which he would have discovered.

<sup>1</sup>The Decadents surely would not leave us with beauty of expression; form and idea have nearly perished in their art.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

That art must have a faculty invented for its understanding and appreciation suggests that the Creator forgot about art when endowing mankind with the original faculties. Judgment without reason is quite as illogical as reason without judgment, and the case of art does not demand this accommodation. It assumes the position that there is something in the cosmos that has been made either by the Creator or man which is not only not the result of a process but which process is not reducible to analysis.

The point is a particular one in this argument, which *places the apprehension and appreciation of art upon the basis of the intellectual process* and denies that there is such a thing as indefinable beauty in art.<sup>1</sup>

The special sense for the appreciation of beauty provided by Kant outside of mere intelligence might be agreed to by the casual visitor to an art museum who looks vaguely at a picture which gives him a favorable impression, and, not being able to analyze his thought, turns helplessly to the guide book wherein with gilded pen the appreciative critic has brought out every lurking charm and set them before him with wonderful and captivating clarity. He exclaims with delight: "I felt all this but could not express it. It seemed to have an appeal beyond expression." True, beyond *his* expression, because he had never investigated art's principles nor used her phraseology. Let, however, this same man familiarize

<sup>1</sup>Later in this argument the point will be taken up again.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

himself with both, and in time the vague qualities which he thought appealed to a separate sense are easily defined as they assort themselves in a logical unfolding of the subject, one point following another with a natural certainty, and the whole appealing to an awakened intelligence. The appeal of the work of art was, in both cases, an appeal to the same faculty. In the first it was as though the beholder had used a near-sighted glass which blurred his vision, and what he saw was merely an ill-defined suggestion of what was there. In the other case, he wore glasses adjusted to his vision and the impression was firmer, more explicit, more intelligible and therefore intellectually more enjoyable.

With the new glasses he could double and treble his enjoyment, and what is more, he could explain to some other man who seemed dazzled with an impression of indefinable beauty, that there was little or no mystery about it, the case needing only an average intelligence made appreciative by an inquiry into the nature of art.

One beholds a landscape of whatever character, either charming or depressing, and discovers an interest in it. This interest is wholly unlike the interest one finds possessing him in looking at a *representation* of the scene by a painter. In nature he accepts the impression without challenge, the miracle of creation being long since taken for granted. His interest in the reproduction of this through man's skill is not alone for the magician's touch which had

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

created it, but in the processes which have necessarily been applied in the systematic unfolding of it, and it is just in this range that the real and growing interest in art exists. It lies not in the scene itself which may be such as in nature one would never care to dwell upon, but in the mind discoverable therein. But for the majority, they may thank Kant for his "Urteilkraft." It has the comfort of a Morris chair wherein, without thought, one may lounge and gaze or listen and get a decent amount of enjoyment from whatever happens.

Passing from the truly high-class perception of the subject by Fichte, who held that beauty exists not in the world but in the soul of the creator of art and that art is the expression of this soul-beauty and that its aim is the endowment of the mind and soul of man, to Schlegel and Müller, whose philosophies were closely allied to each other, we come to Schelling, who held that art was the union of nature with reason, an alliance of the unconscious with the conscious. He declared that it was not man who produced the beautiful in his work by what he knew, but it was the idea or sentiment of beauty in himself which produced it. In this respect Hegel, following him, agreed. But he went farther, declaring truth was beauty. Deity expresses himself at once in Nature and Spirit.

That and that only which the artist possesses of beauty can be reflected into his work from nature. Beauty is but the artist's expression of his idea through matter and he endows it

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

with its charm. With him, therefore, beauty becomes truth both subjective and objective.

Hartmann modifies this to a degree, assuming that beauty does not exist in the external world or in the soul of man. Nothing is beautiful in itself, but is adorned with beauty by the artist.

He leaves us to suppose that the ordinary man without the aid of an artist will know but little of beauty.

Finally, Hogarth, in grim determination to *show* us beauty, does the thing most natural to the artist, he *sketches* it. He selects from a series of curves what he thinks the best, according to his taste and judgment, and holds it up to us as "*the line of beauty.*"

The quest so long and diligently pursued for beauty which may give to art a reason for being, and "an accommodation" which shall fit both beauty and taste in what the artist chooses as his subject, has been the absorbing problem in the philosophy of art.

Under the assumption that art was beauty, many of the theories put forth, therefore, appeal to us as clever and ingenious explanations for an impossible case.

An admission that the expression of beauty is not the first cause, but the result of art is the final attitude that brings illumination into this much-abused subject. The expression of any subject in conformity with such methods as may best express its full essence is bound to be a work of beauty and give pleasure. This conclusion has come to a few modern writers on

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

æsthetics. Herbart and Schopenhauer, Cherbuliez and Todhunter declare what we term beauty — the striving of the artist — is merely such relations in nature as may be unified. These relations are viewed as simultaneous in painting, sculpture, and architecture; as simultaneous and successive in music; and successive in all literature.

One step in advance of these is Sully's declaration that there is no such thing as beauty. "Art," to him, "is the production of some permanent object or passing action fitted to supply active enjoyment to the producer and a pleasurable impression to a number of spectators or listeners, quite apart from any personal advantage to be derived from it."

## II

From the long quest for beauty one turns in the same degree of weariness as in the search for happiness; both are found to be smaller things contained in larger, and always dependent. The essence of art need not have a name; it is not one thing but several, and never the same in any work.

The latest writer of importance who has distinct ideas on this subject, Sir Walter Armstrong, in his introduction to the *Life of Gainsborough* says: "The long delay in perceiving the real nature of a work of art is simple enough. It has been left to those who had never learned to see a work of art as art at all. They saw its literary, its dramatic, its imitative qualities,

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

but were quite unaware that a curve can be as expressive as a gesture" (in other words, that the curve means as much in graphic or sculptured art as a gesture in dramatic art). "None of the philosophers from Aristotle to Kant could have pointed out the difference between Delacroix and Delaroche, of real art and imitation. They have almost invariably considered the objective of art to be representation, and its highest form idealization, the imaginative improvement of the objects represented.

"Their analyses at best have therefore been directed to the comprehension of objective beauty rather than art.

"A certain small group of writers is indeed uncomfortably conscious that the very materials of art have intrinsic powers of expression, powers to convey ideas or emotions without the help of any sort of imitation, but they seem to find the nature of these powers so elusive that they shrink from tracing them back to their source.

"The vital fact in the whole question escapes the thinker who has not trained himself in art as it escapes those who have, like Ruskin, concentrated their interest on the duties rather than the nature of art.

"What we have to discover is an element which runs through all creative activities and justifies the distinction between a book, a dress, or a dinner; which is a work of art and which is not.

"Much speculation about the nature of art has been vitiated at its source by endeavors



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

to discover some absolute constituent of beauty. If Hogarth had been content to think of beauty as a relative and not as an absolute quality he never would have entangled himself in the absurdity of his 'line of beauty,' and many a writer since his time, misled by the same unfruitful idea, has failed to distinguish the point at which a discussion of art should part company with one of beauty."

From that early period when an analysis of art was first attempted, down to the present, the dividing line in philosophic opinion when Aristotle followed Plato, amending and disputing his theories, leaves debatable the question whether art was a matter of the unfettered intuition or was reducible to scientific formula founded on principles. For the most part the world has been aligning itself on the Aristotelian side, largely for the reason that the world is becoming scientific, and has been able to reduce to a formula pretty much everything which exists, as a simple question of cause and effect.

Coleridge in his "Table Talk" declares that every man is born an Aristotelian or a Platonist. . . . "There are two classes of men of which it is next to impossible to conceive a third. The one considers reason a quality, an attribute; the other considers it a power."

With Plato the soul of the thing subordinates the outer expression. With Aristotle the soul of the thing is dependent upon the outer expression. The Orientalists are Platonists, the Occidentals are Aristotelians. They of course

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

touch at many points for with Aristotle the soul or essence bore a large importance.

That these two influences are salutary and mutually corrective, as necessary to the health of art, as opposing political opinion is to the body politic, there can be no question. When the classicism of Aristotle smothers romantic freedom, it incubates a brood of conventions. In due time the intuitive, personal sense, which must enter into even the most formal and exacting expression of art, asserts itself above the convention and the shift to the opposite pole commences. Art usually follows literature; she usually reflects the philosophy of her own age, and some find Jean Jacques Rousseau to be largely accountable for the rise of the romantic school of painting. The Abbé Batteau had, to be sure, paved the way for Rousseau, in his attempt to prove that art was not imitation, that the artist need not be true to natural fact, that he should become subjective and not objective, leading and not following nature. The trouble, however, with this wholesale guillotining of the things held precious, as with the French Revolution, was that much of the good was inevitably buried with the bad and in time the mistake was of course acknowledged. Spontaneity, intuition, and a face set hard against the formative principles of art in an effort to strike the back-to-nature path at any cost found a few, to be sure, at the goal, but distributed most of the following en route in the thick mazes of the woods.

The freedom, the enchantment, the wonder,



GREEK

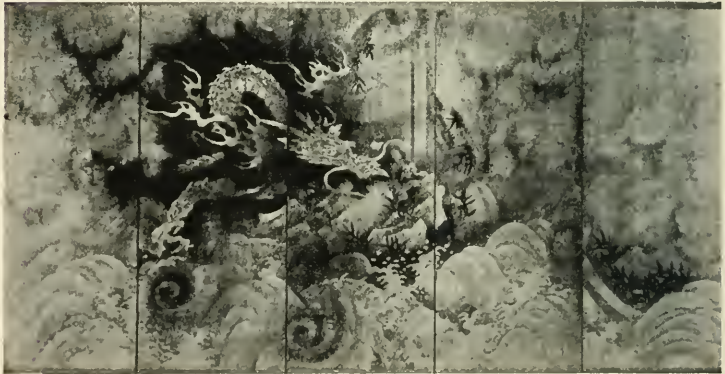


THE STATUE OF THE REPUBLIC — *Paris*

PLATONIC IDEALISM: SCULPTURE



ANCIENT GREECE — IMAGINATIVE LANDSCAPE — *René Ménard*



THE DRAGON AND THE FLOOD — *Eitoku*

PLATONIC IDEALISM: PAINTING

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

the irresponsibility which the romanticists wished to introduce into art they realized not could all take place in a broadened conception of rationalism. It was not necessary to sacrifice any principles of art to attain these effects. Rousseau's high fling at conventions was nothing more than a protest at the amount of unnecessary harness Pegasus was then carrying, and he and his following wished to prove that the animal was just as good and serviceable when ridden bare-back.

After a lapse of two centuries, Henri Bergson has taken his place in the centre of the philosophic stage and in his "Creative Evolution" holds up an even more radical notion concerning the nature and importance of intuitions. In this new philosophy one's expressions in art are tempered by one's antecedents through indeterminate periods, and it is presumed that these affect the product to a greater degree than acquired education.

## CHAPTER IV

### PAST THEORIES AND POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS

“If the passion for creation be not accompanied by the critical spirit, it will surely waste its strength.” — *Oscar Wilde*.

When the church ceased its patronage, withdrawing the beauty of the god-head from before the failing gaze of her retainers, art, as to its subject, was free. Even the purely classical themes of the period have the stamp of beauty which the church demanded and which to all workers in art seemed as appropriate as it was desirable. But art at length was forced to seek new channels — channels in which the purity of the former time seemed not only uncalled for but out of place. The artist proceeded at this tangent, forsaking an orbit in which the beauty of subject and the beauty of its expression had coalesced.

But, having broken with the traditional subject and bent on seeking her fortune in newer fields, Art found the household gods and traditions of former times were bundled after her, and these have been accepted thoughtlessly and without repudiation; so that even to-day this ancient codicil in the will makes beauty the paramount and exacting mark which must

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

be affixed to every work — none genuine without it.<sup>1</sup>

How natural it was that the influence of beautiful presentation left as a heritage to art by Botticelli, Raphael, and Titian should mold the form of thought to those who succeeded them not only as imitators, but those as well who diverged to a radically different subject. We therefore find the portrayals of low and degraded life are frequently adorned by this beauty gift of form which has been stamped upon much of the painting of the Netherlands of the seventeenth century.

The confusion existing for so long a period was the result of including too much in a definition, and of accepting an epigram on its face value, which is usually fatal. Truth being juggled into meaning beauty, the artist was supposed to gain this by expressing truth, and so if he were sincere in his work and wrought with truth his result was acquitted on this basis and pronounced beautiful. This tangle of philosophical sophistry was woven around the unsuspecting artist from the earliest days of his craftsmanship. He, meanwhile, quite unconcerned as to whether his work measured up with the requirements of the wise man or not, kept on expressing himself; the painter painting whatever pleased him, be it saint, peasant, or

<sup>1</sup> So grounded had thought become in the idea that art's *mission* was the expression of beauty, that all sorts of accommodation was invented for admitting into the arcanum of art the exploits of the incapables and the "originals" whose deliberate intention was to produce the ugly, the morbid, and the unbeautiful aspects of life, usually presented in an unbeautiful design.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

beggar, and anxious only concerning its essential character, the methods of applying pigments and with certain principles of construction which experience taught him aided the presentation of his theme. If this turned out good the philosophic critic stamped it with his label of beauty, though it were a defiance by Giotto or the terrors of hell by Michael Angelo, the nightmares of Weirtz, the apologies of the catacombs, the offences of the modern decadents, or the graven monstrosities of Oriental art.

The drawing apart of such art which in its first intention was merely expressive, from that which had been this and more, in its conception and form, forces the admission that art may be quite lacking in beauty and still rank.

Veron in his "Æsthetics" therefore divides art in general into *decorative* and *expressive* art. In the former beauty registers as the first cause, as in decorative design, the non-emotional statues of the Greeks and music; in the second, the first cause is a desire for expression, and beauty (of form) may or may not aid this.

That expressive art may exercise its function without beauty is apparent to any who in this latter day will regard the modern tendencies. When, therefore, under the general impression that the work of art should be beautiful, the layman finds it impossible to agree with the artist in the choice of his subject on this basis, it is for him to seek that element of beauty in the artist's arrangement of unpromising material. How this is put together may in time



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

come to be a delightful and surprising study, directing the mind toward the creative in place of the objective qualities of work. The willingness of the layman in his pursuit of beauty may be repulsed on finding that both the subject and its expression may lack it, and yet conclude in its acceptance as art that it qualifies on some sort of basis. The only one left is technique. Good painting or good modelling is accounted a beautiful thing and indeed it is expressive of the mental attitude of the artist hardly less than is construction. With the technical expression of the subject, then, our intelligence may be greatly pleased, and though crippled by unsatisfying form, or ugliness of subject, the work may yet hold us by such pleasurable interest.

The argument is that though intrinsically non-beautiful and lacking fitting presentation through composition, a work may win the acknowledgment of pleasure through technique; but it has meanwhile been descending by the neglect of other qualities from its higher to its lowest grade.

When, therefore, the questioner in art stands before a Van Steen, a Weirtz, or some of the works of the "new tendency" whispering to his rebellious intelligence these must be beautiful because they are art, or conversely this is art because they are accounted beautiful, he subjects his intelligence to such subversions of reason for which people are committed to insane asylums. The question clears itself over this simple division of the subject: Art,

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

the subject of which is beautiful; that in which the non-beautiful subject is expressed in beautiful design; that in which the non-beautiful subject is expressed for character only and without beauty of design.

### BEAUTY VS. TRUTH

Art has been in due course disproving another philosophical dictum which has been attached to her — namely, that beauty is truth and truth is beauty. In reality, to the artist, truth but rarely contains the beauty which he desires, and beauty may or may not be dependent upon truth.

Truth, to the mind of the average man, is the absolute, without qualification or restriction. Truth is the fact, supporting no theories, favoring no man. Color photography by its combination of right form and right color sets forth absolute truth, but appeals only to the scientist and never to him of artistic instinct; and this for two reasons: In the high, though dead level of its color perfection there is no place to be found for the personal, the thinking, the exaggerating element so important to art; and by contrast with painting, the weakness of naked truth as an exponent of the true impression, is unmistakably exposed.

The wax-colored manikin expresses such truth as to deceive the visitor of the dime museum, but its place is just there or in the museum of ethnology, but never in the gallery of art. That truth is beauty is a doctrine

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

which the artist combats and overturns in about every work he undertakes. If he has put any faith in the statement, it bothers him for he cannot reconcile it with his procedure. When Turner declared that "nature put him out," he meant that his conscience, pecking at him to be truthful, got to be a bore. He knew he did not want truth all the time, but only now and then, for by making certain parts untruthful he was able to call to the aid of other parts greater importance, by contrast.

But just here the *truth-is-beauty* adherent says: "And in doing so he is able to express the greater and more important truth." To which I reply that this is the fallacy that has been befogging the situation since the days of Plato down to the present and brings me very near the point of my argument — i. e., that beauty is not truth but unity. But of this later.

For the moment let us inspect this popular statement which has had currency with so many people, accepted so willingly that the poet who followed their thought did it in verse. Looking the matter over, he set it again in its place on the top shelf, remarking, "This is all ye know or all ye need to know."

Rodin who declares for realism, claiming himself to be "servilely faithful to nature," modifies this statement by stating "there are two ways to offend nature — not to observe her sufficiently and to observe her wrongly. In both cases, artists are well punished. By failure to observe they devote themselves to romanticism; or by excess of detail to banal

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

realism. They become either dilettanti or photographers; æsthetes or disciples of Zola."

Herein he suggests that the truth lies not in extreme realism, but in the mean.

It must be remarked, however, that no art is more adapted to realistic treatment than sculpture. Sculpture selects its subjects with much more scrutiny than Painting or Poetry. The worthwhileness of a creation in bronze or marble and the immense labor involved in the production of a sculptured work acts as a sobering mentor to the exuberant temptation besetting the painter who in a moment may jot down an experimental idea. That many an ephemeral mood or passing fancy if treated realistically would lose its entire charm; or that many subjects of a repulsive character which seem opened to the painter could not in the nature of the case be treated realistically would prove that in art, at least, beauty and truth are often antagonistic. But no surer controversion for the doctrine in the range of art, ancient or modern, could be found than that small work by Rodin, "The Old Courtesan." The beholder who could stick to the theory in the presence of this simple proof of the possibilities for ugliness to the human animal should at the same time concede that our language was in need of a new word with which to express his thought.

To the painter, the theory that truth is beauty is best controverted by the *reductio ad absurdum*. Let him express the color truths and the form truths of things as they happen to coalesce in

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

nature and before long he will realize that the philosophers have been talking all these years to a theory; and when Rodin asserts "the *sole* principle of art is to be servilely faithful to nature," he is either to be taken as qualifying this by *sculptured* art or lays himself open to contradictions, which he unguardedly expresses in his own art.

The man who glories in telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth is created for the witness stand, but is a failure as a social factor, since intercourse demands that truth be tempered with justice, mercy, and humor, qualities which are human, and in the art of depicting life he will also fail and for the same reason.

"This art of telling the truth," says Woodrow Wilson," requires imagination as well as scholarship, art as well as candor and honesty."

That a proposition which has engaged so much of the sober thought of philosophy should be passed with seeming haste or with but a shot or two when the dignified proportions of this fortress might well excite the use of more ammunition, leads the writer to offer one more rebuttal from the painter's point of view to the dogma that beauty is truth.

Let us then take the case of Monticelli as one out of many artists whose execution has grown toward freedom and away from *matters of fact*. In his first period this poet of the palette plainly showed his endowment by the sister muses of painting and poetry. His striving was to honor the latter through his

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

servitude to the former. His poems on canvas were the conscious performances of the student under orders to speak the truth. Trees were trees such as might bear labels; the figures were right, by the standard of the life-class; sky and land bore witness to their scientific aspect. Herein beauty and truth were well wedded, and in much art they remain so. But Monticelli's temperament grew rebellious. The serene truth palled. He experienced a matter-of-fact complacency under its yoke. His art demanded more. So more and more he broke with truth until truth and beauty signed separation papers and the artist was free; free to pay court to either without hindrance by the other. According to his mood for color, design, or effect, as seemed him best, he thenceforth labored. This liberation was the sign of his greatness and this sign received at once the seal of value. During his great period, and before the incursions into his vitality of the absinthe habit gave to his work the fragmentary and uncertain character which so much of it unfortunately possesses, the figures were measures of this or that degree in his game of design, moved as pawns, knights, or castles on the chessboard of his canvas.

The truth-lover, fresh from the thrall of "Modern Painters," inquires what trees are those among whose foliage the nymphs disport themselves; and Monticelli replies perhaps by quoting Dundreary, "One twee is like another twee" to me; something to encase my figures, to throw a shadow, to give me a scheme of light and dark — not this fact, nor that, but

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

all in one; not nature, but design; not color truth, but color sensation; not probability, but possibility; not fact, but fancy; not truth, but art. When you behold my work you need not be reminded of truth or even nature herself, but first of all of me, the creator, fervid, passionate, color-loving, truth-defying man that I am, striving to make a beauty where truth would fail, to rouse emotion in your heart where nature would leave you cold! And so without the knowledge perhaps that Plato agreed centuries before that this was the business of the artist, he lifts art into a range above and beyond nature, into the realm of pure beauty.

When truth falls in with the principles of art, with the emotionalism of the artist and with the sensation which he creates, there is formed a happy family which it is a pleasure to contemplate. And much art expresses these conditions. The particular member, however, of this aggregation holding the whip hand is not truth.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, that the author be not mistaken in what may seem the belittling of truth, it is necessary to reassert that what is written is for that practical class who have neither time for nor patience with the long-drawn theories of philosophic art discourse, the perusal of which as often leaves an impression of vagueness as of clarity. Across twenty-four centuries Plato

<sup>1</sup> "Art gives what nature cannot give. In the energy of the free ego, conscious of harmony not found in nature, beauty is disclosed." — *Schnasse*.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

asserts that "beauty is the splendor of the true," which has left men and still leaves them with an exalted notion of each element of the definition. Delsarte was the first man who dared to rise in the convention of philosophers and say, *Yes, this is fine, but it means nothing!* The true thing in art must mean a definite thing.

Just here Taine in his "Philosophy of Art" is illuminating. He says: "Imitation in art applies to *relationships* and *mutual dependence* of parts." Imitation of facts he proves neither necessary nor desirable. "As a general rule, therefore, whatever interests us in a real personality and which we entreat the artist to extract and render, is his outward and inward logic." (This inward logic is the soul.) Here, therefore, is discovered a more elevated character for art which thus becomes intellectual and not mechanical.

"But art is more than imitation, even in the broad construction of it. The greatest schools are justly those in which active relationships are most modified; examples, The exaggerations of Michaelangelo's de Medici statues and of Rubens's characters in his 'Kermesse' with all its abandon of brutishness.

"The end of a work of art is to manifest some essential of salient character, consequently some important idea, clearly and more completely than is attainable from real objects. Art accomplishes this by employing a group of connected parts, the relationships of which it systematically modifies. To this end the artist must suppress whatever conceals this essential



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

character, select whatever manifests it, correct every detail by which it is enfeebled and recast those in which it is neutralized.”

### ALL TRUTH, BEAUTY

Another proposition and more dangerous is that *all* truth is beauty, under the goad of which the enthusiast rushes in and helps himself to *anything* in nature, declaring it to be beautiful and worthy of his effort; hence the product has for its only interest its technique or color, thus forcing upon art the trivial subject, under the burden of which modern art groans.

This rider which was for a time saddled upon the Impressionistic formula at variance with the greater demands of unity in art is less and less seen — a tacit acknowledgment of the ineffectualness of kicking against the pricks of art's immutable principles. The “back to nature garden” with its seed sown broadcast may or may not prove to be artistic. It depends on who selects the seed and likewise how it is mixed. Just here Mr. Whistler, who declares himself an Impressionist, and M. Monet come into sharp conflict. “To say to the painter that Nature is to be taken as she is, is to say to the player that he may expect music by sitting on the piano. That Nature is always right is an assertion artistically as untrue as it is one whose truth is universally taken for granted.”

Art is hedged in by conventions. In sculpture she has to do with pedestals, in painting,

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

with frames. The least part of her mission is to imitate, the larger part of it is to assist man in expressing himself. Truth and Beauty have each their pedestals and prayer rugs in art's sanctuary, but the artist somehow goes his way between them with a sweet consciousness of the value of their presence as an influence, and now and then he dusts the pedestals and adjusts the rugs.

### BEAUTY, FITNESS

The plea that beauty is fitness is so feeble a one as scarcely to warrant controversy and to get this notion out of the way is necessary before we may frankly confront the art of the world (after it lost its religious character) with the fair criticism which the artist's point of view demands.

Whereas up to the time of this cleavage of art and religion, the artist could scarcely be called the originator of his subject, after that time he was responsible, and went wandering with his wits, free to express *himself*. While therefore the inspiration of the divine subject was wanting, the gauge of man as an artist, as one who would express his *own emotions*, is more justly made *from beyond the point of the high water of the Renaissance*. With the notion of beauty as art's first purpose out of the calculation, a notion which I maintain influenced the artist in but variable degree, but which he winked at as explained for him by the poets or philosophers, he went his way and in time

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

proved that achievement in art follows the natural union of the tripartite nature of man, a union of the body, soul, and spirit of man *with* their correspondences in art. The descent from the pinnacle of the religious renaissance to the level of man's best when bereft of that inspiration is history, and needs no comment. The religious nature of man finds expression through the finer channels of his psychic nature, expressed without restriction in any direction, and out of these are born the heroic decoration, the allegory, the pith of the art of Millet and the romantic painters. By this sign are to be discovered those works which are germane with the spiritual works of the Renaissance and which are quite lost in our calculation in a comparison of present and past art because of their subtlety or their rarity in this latter day.

## THE MORAL MOTIVE

That art must have a moral motive is another confusing proposition; for since the time of Plato this notion has been recognized in many philosophical creeds.

It is at this point that Tolstoy in bearing with his whole colossal weight upon the *subject* and *purpose* of art gives us after all but a one-sided answer to his question, "What is Art?" insisting as he does in the conclusion of his exhaustive treatise that "the destiny of art is to transmit from the realm of reason to the realm of feeling the truth that the well-being of men consists in being united together."

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

Through the entire book, naturally influenced as a *writer* toward the viewpoint of written art, he has used his battering rams against any form of art which does not coincide with his theory. Under the demand that moral teaching be the inspiring purpose of art, he discards a majority of the works of *all the great writers*. Music and Painting suffer a like holocaust.

In defending the writer of "What Is Art?" from the hailstorm of criticisms which rained about him, his translator, Aylmer Maude, while straightening many a crooked place and setting forth Tolstoy's evident intention in much clearer and more cleverly chosen phrases than the author, stumbles into a pitfall which he himself prepared, in striving to justify morality as a prime necessity of art. He says in company with an artist, a maiden lady of refinement, he looked over a print collection published by private subscription, depicting men and women in varied situations in one of the cabinets of a restaurant. The pictures were admirably executed, but owing to their shocking suggestion he could not look at them without ill effects. "But my companion (who prided herself on being an artist) remarked with conscious superiority that from an artist's point of view the subject was of no consequence. The pictures, being very well executed, were artistic and therefore worthy of her attention and study. Morality, she declared, had nothing to do with art." The lady was right, for with her education as an artist her vision was trained



LOVE AND DEATH — *Watts*



"THE EARTH" — *Franz Metzner*

WORKS EXPRESSIVE OF UNIVERSAL IDEAS (MISTAKENLY CALLED IDEALISM)



THE FOUNTAIN OF TIME — *Loreda Taft*. — *Chicago*

This impressive group, eighty feet in length, is a part of one of the greatest sculptural projects of the world's art. It is to complete one end of a lagoon spanned by three bridges, dedicated by special sculptural adornment to Literature, Science and Art. At the other end of the lagoon rises the impressive pile of the Deucallean, the Greek myth of the Creation — the evolution of man from stones to his completest type.

ALLEGORY — THE PRESENTATION OF AN IMAGINATIVE IDEA



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

to look almost entirely for the *æsthetic expression* of the work.

In short, she realized what has escaped both Tolstoy and his defender — namely, that art is not a thing; *it is a way!*

And it is not only a way, but an individual way, which gives an added zest to our interest in art.

“Art,” as Coleridge reminds us, “is the middle quantity *between* the thought and the thing.” It operates in the capacity of a common carrier transmitting what is entrusted to it, intent only in delivering the goods in the best and most satisfactory manner without the right to question *what* they be.

But even this concession is either made grudgingly or denied explicitly by that school of art philosophy set up upon the enthronement of Mr. Ruskin. The sage of Turnerian England had an inherited tendency for the rôle of the prophet; he had a yearning to do his age some practical good and the concessions with which his country had surrounded him afforded at once a bulwark of defence, and that imposing rostrum from which he proclaimed his judgments.

In his assertion that art should be moral he uttered no new dictum; for the association of the beautiful, the true, and the good in art had rung down the ages since the fourth century B. C. and the moral in art was conceded to be as appropriate as that appended to an Æsopian fable. But Ruskin emphasized this. He took strongest hold on the idea of *morality* in art, declaring that only as the fountain was pure

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

could the stream be such. He insisted that the artist be good and moral as well as his art and thereby proved himself a theorist, neglecting to observe through history or by a glance at those near to him, that art and artists are quite consistently paradoxical, ever revealing the element of uncertainty, and never standing close to the findings of the doctrinaire. If morality in the art is dependent upon the like quality in the artist the rule would surely be proven by its exceptions. From Botticelli to Cellini and thence to Hals — but who in this manner could wish to prove Ruskin wrong or recall the death of Raphael: let Mr. Ruskin have Angelo and Leonardo of the immortals.

When Gérôme was asked to purge his class of a few infamous *camarades*, he replied: "You would have me turn out my best pupils." The most spiritual painter in Paris a few years ago was seemingly the most depraved. Thus does art prove itself an enigma and the beautiful and consistent theory of Mr. Ruskin just a theory. But granted that fresh streams flow from roiled springs, that the morality of the artist may or may not have to do with his art, the question remains concerning the right to demand a moral to art's story; or that art to be true art must guarantee this.

In the triumph of right over wrong through all literature until that of the present generation, we concede that this universal rule of the ages is altogether more satisfying than its opposite. We agree with Dante's notion of justice, merely wishing for it the mitigation of modern explana-



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

tions of prenatal influence and environment; with the ever-sure Shakespearian conquest of the right and the be-virtuous-and-you-will-be-happy envoi of the average novel. We submit to Hogarth's "Rake's Progress," and his "Gin Lane," because of the lesson back of them, but can find no excuse for Nana or La Terre or Toulouse Lautrec and his school because of their author's evident delight in those themes wherein a moral, which might justify them, is lacking.

And again there is much art that does not call for a moral, where its presence would be clearly an interpolation, an attempt to give more than the receiver wants or the case permits. This is art which we love, as we do a person, purely for its own sake, without reward. "It is the uncommunicable element of artistic delight which in poetry, for instance, comes from what Keats calls the 'sensuous life of verse,' the element of the song in singing, and in painting that which is to be sought for from the subject never, but from pictorial charm."

On this point Oscar Wilde in his clear epitome of art, while acknowledging with loving gratitude the obligation which he, as a pupil of Ruskin together with all the world, owes the great apostle of art, frankly declared: "To us (of the newer school) the rule of art is not the rule of morals," and again: "Poems are either well written or badly written, that is all. Any element of morals or an implied reference to a standard of good and evil in art is often a sign of incompetence."

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

There are, however, many opportunities for making art better, stronger, more interesting and more valuable through *inferential qualities*, which are frequently omitted.

### ART OF THE PRESENT

That art should express its own age, though a more modern demand, is none the less fallacious, and moreover its shallowness is in contrast with the sincerity of the foregoing propositions. A glance at history shows it to be without warrant in either literature or the visual arts. It is a dogma set up in the creed of both modern writers and painters, a handmade affair, created out of expediency and justified because it was deemed to be a good thing. A protest it certainly is against classicism and an efficient eye-opener to the subject at our feet over which we have looked in straining for the more remote inspiration. It is the advice given a generation ago by Emerson,

“Tell men what they knew before,  
Paint the prospect from their door —”

and while expanding the objective range of art toward the foreground should by no means obscure her vistas. Under this demand art closes the door upon imagination and discounts memory. Art can have no part in expressing history, and has no place in the land of the unknown, the realm of fancy.

A regard for the past is no proof that one

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

lacks sympathy with the present, but rather that his view is universal. Such a one resents clapping an up-to-date gown on art and making her a creature of fashion. The ambition to be up-to-date in art should prove either that the fashion satisfies one's mood or that the artist does not dare assert himself. The painter who changes his technique to fit a passing fad would be as likely to change his subject when assured of the vogue.

That art must be modernized is not nearly so important as that art should be saved. Toward this dual ambition the missionary's first act usually is to put the subject into stiff hats and trousers of the period. Against all this Delsarte reared his impressive art philosophy, and in the midst of the chaos of modern academic teaching referred the standard of true artistic perception to the formula of the Greek antique on the broad basis of which he most clearly demonstrated the universality of art and art principles.

It must be forgiven the fervid temperament of the artist that in the heat of a new concept, the boiler becomes so charged with steam that additions are both unnecessary and dangerous. It was always so. Artists are in their dogmas the most narrow-minded of mortals; while in their sympathies the largest hearted. The Impressionist sees good only in his own sort; the follower of Whitman calls Tennyson "old hat!" The man of modern subject dubs him who expresses the flavor of the past, a back number.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

This all comes from the narrow, unthinking, provincial notion which the students of art, failing, as the majority do, to grow out of the warped and specialized influence of the academies, carry with them into professional life. They don't know what art is; for few academies think it necessary to inform them; sufficient if they keep on making the drawing "look like" getting the true color. Groping for some sort of affiliation, they accept the most influential at hand and become, naturally, ardent supporters of the method of this man or that.

If the man of influence says: "Paint life around you. Go to the slums, the alleys, the workshops, the parks, and watering places; art must express its own age," the bevy of students at once accept the voice as final and in complete conviction of its wisdom declare nothing else is worth while. In such national art as that of the Chinese or Japanese, which is wholly concerned with the native subject, native philosophy, and above all with idealism, one can neither expect nor ask that it do else than reflect its own national spirit; but in contradistinction with these conditions, the artist of the West has ever stood for individuality, declaring there is no nationality in art. Art should not only be accounted not national, it should be so universal in its aims and so elastic in its means as to make no account of time. History attends to this. The man of the twentieth century who was born in the spirit of the fourteenth or fifteenth, should express that spirit.

When Mr. Oppenheim announces, "It is the

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

poet's function to express his own age," averring "if I want Elizabethan England I go to Shakespeare," he seemingly forgets that Shakespeare thought his art also worthy to exploit the life of Greece, of Italy, and Denmark, or to invade fairyland or no-man's land in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" or "The Tempest," proving himself the universal genius whose spirit could find response in any place or time.

The art whose subject reflects its own age is necessarily the art of the reporter, and that a people's history should be written in their art is a notion which keeps art at the business of illustration. But the measure of art is larger: she proclaims from the housetop upon all topics. With her ear in readiness for response from any quarter, art is dependent solely in her product upon whether or no the instrument through whom she speaks (the artist) can justify his longing to present her.

Would we have Watts painting the ragpickers of the Ghetto when his hand and heart were fitted for the great messages of transcendentalism, or should Cabanel have painted in place of his Aphrodite caressed by waves and attended by cherubs, a French bourgeoisie lying on the sand surrounded by her children? Could art be any better conserved by this shift?

But should there be an amendment of the formula and Art be required to express herself in the *spirit* of her own age, the proposition is no less debatable; for to put a subject out of its own environment, to treat an ideal subject with the insisting detail of modern realism, to phrase

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

a poem on Love or to the Faerie Queene in the popular vernacular of the present might be to compliment Kipling, but would leave an accounting with Arthur Dobson and Coventry Patmore, to say nothing of Keats, Coleridge, and Shelley. To fall out with Charles Kingsley or Maurice Hewlett because the chronicles of "Hereward" and "Richard Yea and Nay" were not given in the present style of modern fiction, is to deny an added charm to the subject's environment. It is by the grace of art that we are granted selection, not alone of material but of method, a matter in which art is freeing herself more and more as individualism becomes dominant. Quite up to the present, art has followed "the trend." But nations are ceasing to move as units, the people are beginning to do their individual thinking, and a catholicity of taste in both the subject of art and its expression has become the most welcome and promising index of our age.

The comprehension of Goethe's advice, "Fill your mind and heart with the ideas and sentiments of your own age and the work will follow," could not of course mean anything else from this universal genius than that the work of whatever sort, modern or classic, should find best expression in the man alive to the spirit of his own age.

And as to subject, let us thank the seers of artistic vision that have discovered subject in the alleys, the factory, the skyscrapers, the canal, the blast furnace, the coal derrick, and in

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

those that labor there amid the steam, the hurry, the clamor of bells and the clank of machinery. Their results are proofs to those too absorbed to really know the fulness of their own age that the sensation which art can produce and which they have looked for as of necessity the product of different conditions, may be able to rise and grasp them out of the jar and jostle of our chaotic life.

## THE NEW POETRY

The call from the younger school of poets that the technique of their art must reflect the spirit of our age, or what one of them declares to be the "dominant chaos of our age," is completely in line with modern unrest. The fervent desire on all sides to discover *something* is likely to produce as much experimentation in poetry and painting as in science. The argument of the advertiser — "It is different" — here likewise has its lure. Difference of subject is not enough; but a new thing in a new way!

And so we have "poetry" which cannot be sung, which lacks the very song sense, which lapses into prose when it started in metre, a hybrid creature, like the statue part of gold, part of iron, part of clay as distinguished from the golden image of Athene. Would Phidias have held the same place in the hearts of his countrymen or of succeeding generations had he completed his task with iron legs or clay feet? Nay, but this is the spirit of our age and the politicians are the first who brazenly prac-

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

tise it. If the artist is of any practical use to his time it is to hold up standards of true beauty and not apologize for makeshifts. It is the compliment of Philosophy to him that in being accorded the finer vision, the more cultured taste, the more practised hand, he was prepared by nature and contact to know and to do the thing conservative of the best. In coming down to the level of his age, the result is likely to be, as those compromises usually are, not a redemption of the majority, but the loss to the minority.

The artist is held to be the "exemplar of orderly enthusiasms," the one whose *temperament* can never quite disturb the poise of the principles by which he is governed. It is an interesting fact which all poetry of the new cult exposes, that in every case it sets forth at a given rhythmic pace and proceeds for a time like Peter on the wave crests, achieving in this element, when suddenly the embarrassment of distrust assails, and the slump follows, but with help at hand the joy of procedure comes again, and Peter as he clammers over the gunnel exclaims with excited pride, "Well, I kept going, anyhow! I have got here all the same!"

The great and generic difference, in a word, between prose and poetry is form; the one may be sung, the other cannot be. If the "cannot be sung" element is allowed to qualify with the "can be sung," in what proportion may this be permitted? Here is a very practical question. May not the inch in time become the ell? If the poet may dismount every time Pegasus



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

bucks it would be as well for him to admit he is not a Pegasus rider and change his means of locomotion. If he would express the spirit of his age, behold the automobile, the aeroplane; in these there is no effort to him who employs them. He is not obliged to use reins, stirrups, nor cante, nor show form.

Should the non-metrical "poetry" of the present be presented as prose few there would be to detect the poet. The writer has made tests in reading some of this to varied groups and in every case it was pronounced prose. When shown to the company the exclamation has been, "Ah, this is poetry!" "Why?" "It is so printed." If the prose of Washington Irving and Théophile Gautier is more rhythmic than some modern poetry, by what standards are the two sorts of literature to be classified?

In *none* of the arts does the product qualify by either its *subject matter* or *the will to do*. All art of whatever sort is *form, design*, performing by virtue of limitations, and under bonds, and the emotions must accept the conditions.

Poetic measure should not be accounted a restriction, but a privilege.

Here Plato bows to Aristotle, and the writer of "The Poetics" tells us the musical throb of the emotions is necessarily most distinctly felt in metre. He who throws form to the winds may continue to be a wise man and an entertaining one, but compromises his claims as a poet: the difference between poetry and non-poetry is not psychological, it is æsthetic, not subjective but objective.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

“It is, after all,” said Oscar Wilde, “merely that perfection of execution without which a poem or painting, however noble its sentiment, is but wasted and unreal work.”

But one's emotions are stirred no less by prose than poetry, and their evocation proves effective, alike for either expressive mode and includes in its embrace this third species in literature. Its distinct separation from the other two creates a just demand for recognition — under an independent banner. “A mule!” says Lessing, “is a very useful beast in spite of the fact that he is neither a horse nor an ass.”

Instead of altering the definition of poetry to include non-metrical phrase, a new term should be supplied for it. Granting the real and positive exhilaration which these works afford, let us enjoy this manifestation of literature from its proper point of view. When we read it let us prepare for shocks and discords; when we dance with it let us expect our feet will clash and that gowns will be torn, and when we name it let it be with the real conception of art in mind. Says the author of the “New Laocoon”:  
“To satisfy the standards of poetry without offending the standards of prose — this is a miracle which has only been achieved by the great poets.”

In like manner should we observe the present development in painting. On the basis of universal principles and with neither fear nor favor for the fact of its appearance just now — at a time which we call the present — let us gauge it at its worth, not as the last word, but

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

as a passing word in the great perspective of art.

How applicable to the "new tendencies" in this art are the remarks on Whitman by Arthur Jerome Eddy: "The revolt of Whitman is nothing new; it is perfectly natural; it is the revolt of the child, of the savage, of the natural man against convention (made so often in some degree by every individual) to dispense with experience, to learn it all and do it all for himself regardless of the precepts and practices of others; of the failures and successes of others. It will never do; the attempt must end in failure more or less pronounced. Form is more than convention, more than precept; it is the mold in which ideas are most perfectly cast; not only a source of delight to the beholder but an invaluable discipline to the thinker, the poet, the painter, and the sculptor. Few are the poets in whose work the struggle of form is not felt. Whitman might have been stricken dumb had he been obliged to follow up his first lines with lines in the same exquisite metre, to say nothing of the additional fetter of rhyme; but, and herein lies the essence of the matter, would not the world have been the gainer if Whitman had said less and said that less better?"

"The restraint of form is wholesome. Ideas that seem to come to us with the force of thunderbolts — great, broad, glittering generalities that seem like universal truths the world will hardly wait to hear — these ideas shrink to their proper proportions when reduced to form. There is nothing lost in the process save, pos-

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

sibly, some of our vanity. It is a good deal easier to wander on indefinitely with neither beginning nor end, jotting down every fragment, suggestion, or inkling of thought as it comes, filling great, broad, white pages or smearing over great, broad, clean canvases, than it is to think it out, wrestle it out.

“The method of Whitman was to turn his mind upside down like a bag, leaving his readers to sift those heaps for whatever of value they contained, to do the work he should have done.

“If you read Whitman and read him in connection with any other great singer you will know what riot and license mean as applied to art, and you regret that a man who could write so well did not always do so, with that severity and serenity which come only with a mastery of form.”

In a word, Whitman too often used his notebook sketches for finished pictures, unwilling to exchange the magic touch of primitive inspiration for that something which, though better, could not contain and preserve it.

## CHAPTER V

### REALISM AND IDEALISM

"Ye cannot serve two *masters*."

THERE is probably no conception affecting art more beclouded to the average mind than the distinction between Realism and Idealism. Indeed, were one to appeal directly to members of the profession he would be likely to receive counter opinions, or, what is quite as confusing, evasive answers. Here the philosophers will give us quite as wide a choice of definition as they have concerning beauty or art itself.

The simple first cause for this confusion is the supposition that art is divided into Realism and Idealism, and that therefore artists are either realists or idealists. In fact, since Idealism must find its base for expression in realistic presentation, the idealist at the start is some sort of a realist and in his idealistic effort may express numerous degrees of realism.

Seeking light at the fountain head, we may find that in the philosophy of Greece, both Platonic and Aristotelian, the ideal was the archetype, the perfect pattern, of which all created things were the imperfect anti-types or representations. God saw that it was good —

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

that is, good enough — but perfection was reserved for a better world. The ideal therefore exists not in nature, but in the mind, and when expressed by the artist becomes necessarily a composite of nature and man's constructive will. The product thus shaped illustrates a concept or idea concerning some generic or abstract subject. Thus to the artists of Greece in their attempt to make manifest the spirit of their gods, each a personification of a specific abstract quality, man was used as the base, and to this either by the accompaniment of some symbol or by an especial and sublime expression, the model or base was fitted to body forth an abstract idea. That the realistic copying of the model under these conditions would have thwarted the larger conception in charge of a still greater idea is plainly apparent — that is, to have modelled a good-looking Greek youth and with the addition of winged sandals thought this sufficient to represent Mercury, or to select a good-looking grandfather and with a thunderbolt in his hand let him answer for Jove, would have been to the Greek mind a sacrilege no less to the gods than to art itself. The sense of the archetype, so essential to the Platonic ideal, would have been lacking. Exactly the same feeling also did the Greek express in his statue to his hero or to the actual representation of the athlete. It is easily read upon these countenances that imitation of that intimate and personal kind that means "likeness" or "realism" is wanting. It has been carefully eliminated. The effort has been rather

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

to record a type, a type existing in the realm of the ideal.

Now these types were an agreement on the part of the nation, and in their visible creation through their artists a consensus of the national opinion was expressed; they, therefore, typify not merely ideals of Praxiteles, Phidias, or Scopas, but of the whole people.

With us, the ideal type is expressed in Uncle Sam, John Bull, the Goddess of Liberty, Britannia, or Germania, etc.; universal types to all men for generic ideas. So likewise does the behooded figure become a universal idealization of Death, a concept still further assisted by the symbol of the scythe or inverted torch. Keeping close to the original Platonic conception of the term, Idealism draws, in this latter day, a very limited bow. Some one has said it lived and died in Greece.

The term as commonly used to-day, however, is something distinct and apart from the primal conception and would differentiate itself from its original and truer significance if in place of *idealism* we were to create a new word, *ideaism*, and reverting again to the Platonic notion of the word "idea," which to this philosophy signified *a form* seen in the mind, we would endow this new word with what the other has been obliged to express. *Ideaism* might long since have come into the glossary to the enlightenment and relief of philosophic terminology but for its apparent lack of euphony. Because of this, doubtless, we have been willing to make one word do the duty of two, and the

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

confusion arising has been the consequence of our unwillingness to accept this or coin another word to clearly express an important idea. The need of a term of unimpeachable character and above suspicion and without entangling alliances with any other term is apparent when the word "idealism" is made to likewise do service in the case, for instance, of Millet's "Sower" as an expression of the larger idea of *Labor*.

This is not an idealization of the peasant in order that he should stand for a specific idea. In fact, the more of a peasant he is in his lowliness and simplicity and in those realistic qualities that affiliate him with the soil, the better fitted he would be to express this abstract idea. The only anxiety on the part of the artist would be that he should not look like any particular peasant, for were this allowed, forthwith would his idea be deprived of flight and brought to earth, and the concept become particular instead of generic. Here, then, is something practically in the range of *reality* used to typify an *abstract idea*. This is wide of the original or Grecian notion, the creation of the archetype, or *ideal type*. The ideas which may enter in and modify the art concept are innumerable as man's individuality is varied. We are distinctly lacking a term to correctly express this situation in art. The surrender to the outer vision is Realism, the surrender to the inner vision is Idealism; but what word shall express this broad and most important feature of art creation—namely, an abstract idea ex-



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

pressed in natural form, the form remaining unchanged.

The painter who creates a landscape "out of his head" in nine times out of ten finds it to be a reconstruction of forms already used by him, or the figure painter of the Monticelli-Diaz type merely supplies through the imagination his idea of form and color, and presents us with something original, *founded on fact*. They are, therefore, not idealists in the true sense of creating a type or expressing a general conception. These people occupying a distinct and important position in art should be furnished with a fitting term of designation in art's nomenclature.

## II

The five distinct types of painting classified on the basis of subject are :

- (a) The ideal, or creation of the archetype;
- (b) the symbolistic, in which form stands for or symbolizes a general idea, a range in which mural decoration plays its most important rôle;
- (c) those subjects expressive of a sentiment or a mood of man, or in recognition by him of that which is provocative of a sentiment found in nature, a range covered largely by landscape;
- (d) those subjects illustrative of an event, the historic, the story-telling or genre subject;
- (e) subjects of purely representative intention, either imitative, in the strictly nature-like sense, or interpretive, but in which the purpose of the artist is realistic expression

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

Between strict Idealism and strict Realism are three classes, which Realism, in varying degrees, assists.

But while the idealist must of necessity become a realist up to that point of preparing a tenement for his conception, the realist, especially of the sworn and outspoken sort, is usually so devoid of sympathy with this antipodal mode as to give it wide berth. For a realist to attempt the *universal concept* is as illogical an act as in the province of art can well be performed.

To take one Smith, an American, and make him do for Uncle Sam, or use the portrait of Jones, an Englishman, as the typical John Bull, or create a silver portrait statue of Ada Rehan and make her do for Nevada,<sup>1</sup> should be no more shocking to one's sense of propriety in art than to see the portrait of a French model doing service as a goddess of Grecian mythology, or the close counterfeit of a Spaniard or an Italian made to answer for an Apollo or Orpheus.

Spanning these frowning cliffs of Idealism and Realism, M. Rodin has essayed to throw a bridge uniting Platonic ideality to an individual type. Psyche is a French girl whose address may be had on application. Eurydice, she of the hair drawn over the forehead from its part on the side in the latest of modes, will give you her address without asking; one may pass her on the Boulevard Mt. Parnasse almost any day, or see her riding a student's back at the *Bal des Quatre Arts*; and Orpheus, so well

<sup>1</sup>World's Fair, Chicago.



THE MEMORIES COMFORTING SORROW — *L. Bistoff*

ALLEGORY OF UNIVERSAL IDEAS



EDICT OF TOLERATION — *Edwin Blashfield*

ALLEGORY OF HISTORY — FIGURATIVE PRESENTATION OF FACT

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

known at Julian's! He has posed thus academically many a time; so easily identified by the enormous seventh cervical vertebra almost the size of a pigeon's egg, by his long arms, his thin wrists and heavy shoe-distorted feet, and the *tensor vaginae femoris* thrown out as it always is at the end of a seance in awkward assertiveness of line, but so characteristic of this model. These specific identifications remind us that idealism is being performed by a realist, by one who claims that art means "the servile imitation of nature," and at the same time by one who, sensitively alive to this inconsistency with both philosophic sense and artistic feeling, would fain work some miracle that will, in part at least, conceal it. Idealism, then, if incorporated, must here be applied to the surface, and necessarily becomes a process of technical manipulation. Realism crosses the chasm and enters the realm of the spirit, of Platonic idealism, by making Mademoiselle Chose, who has posed for Psyche, representing to us, no less than the Greeks, the abstract notion of pure love, by making this French girl, with the pug nose and of distinctive individual type, a little less like herself by *idealizing the technique*. In place then of Rodin's vigor of true realism, we have in these ideal subjects a weakened, hot-housed, hectic substitute, smothered contours and candle dip finish. To sculptors the process is simple. If the material be clay, a continuous sprinkle from the syringe will produce it — if wax, heating the surface with a taper will effect the

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

same result, an operation assuming that the process of baptism effects regeneration, that the significance of redemption lies in an altered exterior, rather than a change of spirit. But to deny no credit where credit is due, let us acknowledge in this that as a realist the sculptor has been true to his creed. He has servilely copied reality; but had he allowed any one of these models of the Latin Quarter to stand as *realistic* embodiments of general, abstract ideas, defying the world in the brusque assertion that to his mind they did represent the ideal, our respect would have been evoked to a degree now denied in the acknowledgment through this technical subterfuge that he believes nothing of the kind.

Returning to the Rodin gallery after a tour through the adjacent halls of Greek sculpture in the Metropolitan Museum one may be able to quickly compare the two types of Idealism. A brief sojourn in the presence of this higher philosophy of art should be able to speak the convincing word not only regarding the purpose of Greek art, but of its separation from the modern point of view. It is not a question of externals, for in Rodin's St. John or Madam X, the surface quality is as remarkable in the *distinctive* excellencies as that of the Elgin marbles; it is the question of an operation commencing from within and working its way out, instead of a reverse process. It is the difference between the philosophies of Plato and Hobbs.

One of the sages has curtly epitomized the

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

situation thus : "Strictly speaking, all men are idealists — the difference is in their ideals. What we believe to be best is our ideal — our inspiration or damning limit. Vulgar ideals make vulgar people. Consecration of thought to transcendent ideals make poets and seers. The materialist is a man of material ideals."

### III

But as to Realism, let us hasten to make the distinction between imitation and reality, and again between the real and the sensation of the real. Here are three degrees in the conception of art.

When Manet gave voice to the epigram, "Not nature, but the natural," he covered the entire case of modern painting. These diamond-studded words deserve to be inscribed over the door posts of every atelier, for under this insignia most makers of modern art may draw up in the banqueting hall and proceed with the lovefeast. This, in fine, becomes the criterion of judgment for all juries; it describes the circle in which modern art performs.

As to imitation, *per se*; it had its short day of recognition, but soon wearying our real sense of art it was banished from the sanctuary and died in the arms of Science. The common mind glories in the fly with his six legs, sipping sweets from the punctured peach or pear, pictured with such deception that we want to shoo him away, and its final delight is expressed over the dollar bill that could pass current if

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

only we could get it off the panel. The *task* of imitation can have for its goal but one thing, deception, and it seems paradoxical that truth could have as its goal this same end. Under such constraint truth would naturally be content with a degree short of this, and somehow one may almost consider the Greek art of painting as fortunate in its destruction lest we should be compelled to witness its supreme efforts in imitation; and no less fortunate that time has cleansed Greek statues of the paint which, applied for imitative effect, sought to endow with greater reality what now exists in its more transcendent beauty bereft of it.

As to reality; here is a goal worthy the ingenuity of any mimetic art — to call forth upon the pedestal, the page, or canvas, Nature in her essence and fulness. The various methods of this accomplishment are well-nigh as varied as the membership of the artistic professions. We have the designations of tonists, impressionists, pleinairists, etc., but no two members in any class are alike. Each interprets his problem as seemeth him best, and lastingly to the glory and interest of art it is so.



## CHAPTER VI

### INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSION

“‘This is my habit,’ quoth the stork.”

A FINAL misconception is one shared equally by the public and the profession — namely, that there is *but one way*. True, there are laymen and artists who know better; but the majority in both classes are frankly partisan. The artist who achieves, will naturally believe in the method of his choice, and the public quite as naturally falls in with the vogue. There is therefore as much effort to make any particular way fashionable as to make it good. Both artists and the handlers of art must confess to the impeachment of such effort toward the making of one kind and the unmaking of the rest. Just here a glance down the perspective of art suggests a place for Tolstoy's notion of brotherhood in art — a conception of universality based on a simple idea.

One man will have nought but old masters, and cannot believe the impulse of his own age; another would as positively discard everything save “the last word.” The men who cannot own a Millet and a Monet are more frequently found than those who can, and more rare than either is he who knows that they merely

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

require separate walls to free themselves from conflict.

The warfare in painting centres largely on technique. The mode of doing pictures is as essential to the *monde* as that of doing hair. True there may be varied styles in each, yet each must have the mark of its style. This is the most persistently aggressive bee which infests the art bonnet. The one-way enthusiast declares all is valueless that is not executed in the presence of nature, another asserts that only through *process* can the best and deepest significance of nature be reached, a third, protesting that nature is but byplay, decries all technique which is imitation, exalting spiritual significance and belittling technique which might compete with it.

The broker of the wheat or cotton pit, turning wearily toward art in its offer of "repose," could find a real surprise in a competition concerning ways and means in art which would make the vehemence of the Exchange seem humdrum.

We glance again down the perspective of art; there, brightly shining from cloudless skies, the sun reveals, as in centuries past, the same placid face of the Sphinx, the statues of kings in static serenity. Across the Ægean we are met with a welcome of beauty; fauns pipe to us, Silenus is kindly, the gods hush our ecstasy with quiet gestures; in the orient the artist, musing before nature seeks in time the seclusion of his workshop and there extracts her spirit; again, we pause at the fervor of the primitives, we comprehend their message, but find it

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

expressed in increasing degree of clarity and strength as we mount to the farthest heights of art's golden age; we feel the artist released from the bonds of the church and mark his descent into the varied paths of individualism; we join him in the brothel, on the hillside, among the sheep and cattle; he interests us with the lesser phases of nature, trees, flowers, windmills, rivers, butcher shops, still life; all of these he renders with curious care; his work is good because he has learned the trade of painting and is interested in his work; his expression is adequate; none live beyond their age, but in it; in time we detect revolution, a drawing apart and greater individualism; it is of interest to mark the different mold of mind; one magnifies color; another form; another design, a group haunting the forest expresses its large and massive sobriety, but following closely a group pronouncing for the opposite quality of vivacity, here a shout of triumph toward the light, there a recoil toward the rude strength of a former time, here an uplift of nature, supreme; there, mysticism, symbolism and a return to childhood.

From all of them we gather a varied pleasure; each has its own sensation, its mode; each has justified its place in the chain of art, each is valued as a separate link.

If one lapses into a reverie during such a contemplation he can be rudely awakened almost any day by the honest and emphatic assertion of some modern man that in his opinion there is *only one way*.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

### II

One has said: "In order to find the highest reach of the idea of man we have to look beyond personality, and the totality of expressions of the individual is but the synthesis of the collective idea. These collective ideas condensed and synthesized by the individual genius are precisely those that are expressed in the masterpieces of art." The point is a fundamental one, for on it rests the whole fabric of Greek æsthetic achievement.

"It was the insistent opinion of Delsarte, waxing stronger as year after year he delved into the heart of Greek art, that modern artists have not so far mastered the underlying principles of art, because no matter how grand their subject, or how sublime their conception of it, or how perfect the execution, they have one and all since antiquity failed to express true art whenever they attempted to be original. That is to say, their expression is always personal and not universal, not divine—it is purely human. Their faces are ideal faces of their countrymen or of women they love. An Italian madonna is an idealized Italian, and appeals to the imagination of the Italian only, as an ideal of divine maternity. Dutch madonnas are all Dutch women and cannot therefore appeal to other than Dutch men.<sup>1</sup>"

But Greek beauty is universal because it is strictly impersonal and divine in its expression. "Greece, apprehending the true principles of

<sup>1</sup>Genevive Stebbins.



THE JESTER — *Frans Hals*



COW GIRL — *Dagnan-Bouveret*



A ROMAN EMPEROR — *Alma-Tadema*



WATCH AND WARD — *Bouguereau*



STILL LIFE — *Chardin*

REALISM — VARIED TYPES — PAINTING



THE AGE OF BRONZE — *Rodin*



WOMAN AND PEACOCK — *Falguiere*

REALISM — SCULPTURE

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

art, reduced expression of nature to its grand universal law; a law demanding the personified delineation of *impersonal ideas*, powers, passions, and principles; and the balanced attitude, the changing curve, and spiral line are the artistic expression of universal, hence godlike, potentialities."

## CHAPTER VII

### TOLSTOY AND DELSARTE

THAT Tolstoy persisted in forcing himself to the evidently uncongenial task of writing on art will remain a lasting regret to the friends of the great novelist. By his cast of mind Tolstoy was neither artistic nor scientific. He, in fact, was too much of an ascetic to be touched by art. His was the stuff that prophets and hermits are made of. His disdain for the "cultured crowd" and their appurtenances was radical. In early manhood he turned his back on all of that. His delight was to hold it up to ridicule, and to this end he followed doggedly with the keen eye of relentless criticism. Exclusive of that life, he naturally excluded its environment, its manners, its music, its literature, its painting. He could see no good in what appealed merely to the æsthetic sense, or lacked a moral basis. To him the literature of the Greeks was "meaningless" — Sophocles, Euripides, Æschylus, and especially Aristophanes. The critics, he declared, are responsible for our admiration of Dante, Tasso, Milton, and Shakespeare, and for Raphael and Michael Angelo, whose "Last Judgment" he calls "absurd." In music he condemns "the whole of Bach," and "the whole of Beethoven, including his last period." Wag-



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

ner, Liszt, Berlioz, Brahms, and Richard Strauss, in modern music, and Puvis de Chavannes, Klinger, Böcklin, Stuck, Schneider, etc., in modern painting, affected him in like manner. The present modern tendencies lashed his furies to greater vehemence.

For his pleasure in art as in life he demanded simplicity, facing the whole fabric of it behind his natural ward, the under man. To him of clouded life, of limited resource, to him lacking opportunity for knowledge, art should come as a link of union between such a one and his fellows. As an agent for promoting a universal brotherhood, art's first requisite should therefore be comprehensibility. Art can be universal only by being simple.

<sup>1</sup>“Art is not a pleasure, a solace, or an amusement; art is a great matter. Art is an organ of human life, transmitting man's reasonable perception into feeling. In our age the common religious perception of men is the consciousness of the brotherhood of man — we know that the well being of man lies in union with his fellow men. Science should indicate the methods of applying this to life. Art should transform this perception into feeling.”

This is a true epitome of the *privilege* of art, but the enthusiasm of the moral teacher blinds him to the simple fact that this could not be done if it were not possible to interest men in art by pleasing them therewith. The emotion (or feeling) which will unite two men over the painting of a landscape *cannot be evoked* unless

<sup>1</sup> “What Is Art?” — *Leo Tolstoy*.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

they enjoy the picture, nor can the design of a Turkish rug unite men unless it first please them. When we enter the range of "instructive" art which easily holds up a lesson to our comprehension, then it becomes the *lesson* and not the art that unites men in this agreement over the moral of the picture. Art is the silver salver upon which these moral lessons are handed out, but the method by which a thing is done and its effects are distinct matters, and it is of first importance to separate two such notions.<sup>1</sup>

### II

We are under true obligation to this unflinching prophet in his use of the whipcords for the riddance from the temple of the false worshippers and money changers; for Art is full of unworthy parasites, those who make and those who barter her, but in his overturnings and iconoclasm he has broken many an image of true æsthetic interest whose only failure was in not being consecrated to his particular shrine.

The initial premise in this scheme is an error, founded directly on Tolstoy's assumption that art is a "great matter."

Instead of this, as Coleridge, (whom he seems to have omitted in his voluminous quotations from writers on art) might have reminded him, "Art is not a thing; it is a way." That idea tersely stated by one of the keenest thinkers

<sup>1</sup> Whatever has not moral significance is excluded by Tolstoy from "real art."



SHEPHERDS OF ARCADY — *Poussin*



THE OATH OF THE HORATH — *David*

NEO-CLASSIC PAINTING



DANTE AND VIRGIL — *Delacroix*



THE RAFT OF THE MEDUSA — *Géricault*

ROMANTIC PAINTING

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

of all time, plunges the inevitable crowbar beneath this imposing monument.

And what a pity! It was fifteen years a-building, and Tolstoy tells us he made six distinct attempts to complete it and failed. He finally finished it in desperation and with "hopes."

Tolstoy seems more engrossed concerning subject for art expression than the essence of art which is involved in his question, "What is Art?" The subject matter, he declares, for the best art can be of but two kinds: (1) Feelings flowing from the highest perception of our relation to our neighbors and to the source from which we come, uniting us in a more vivid sense of compassion and love; (2) the simple feelings of common life accessible to every one, provided they do not hinder our well being.

"The religious perception of our time which consists in acknowledging that the aim of life (both collective and individual) is the union of mankind — is already so sufficiently distinct that people have now only to reject the false theory of beauty according to which enjoyment is considered to be the purpose of art, and religious perception will naturally take its place as the guide of the art of our time."

Religious perception when finally clarified will be the one universal perception, and such works as those of Dickens, Hugo, Dostoevski, the story of Joseph sold by his brethren, and in painting those of Millet, Bastien-Lepage, Jules Breton, L'Hermitte, and such feelings which

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

all may understand will be known as the proper exemplars of true art.

The difference between science and art, he declares, is that science instigates and brings to human perception such truths and knowledge as people consider most important. Art transmits these truths from the region of perception to the region of emotion.

Art may be known by its "*power of infection.*" The greater, the more universal art is, the greater number will it infect. The infection is potent in degree as it causes the one addressed to receive the same emotions which the artist desires to pass on to him. Tolstoy, therefore, has in this treatise supplied us with elaborate *tests* for proving this side of art, but has given no *reasons* for his question, "What is Art?"

He discusses no principles. To the painter's query, for instance, as to *what is alcohol*, he would deem it sufficient to reply: "You may know what alcohol is by dropping a little on a varnished surface. If it infects and softens it, you may know it is alcohol."

The test of *infection* is efficient only as we have the proper subject to deal with, one who possesses the allied germ.

To the doctor's question, what is the active principle of scarlet fever, Tolstoy would reply: "You may know it by infection. If the subject comes down with the disease you may know the active principle was present." The activity of the principle was apparent in its being passed on to some other person so that he has the fever.

These examples are not invented in the spirit

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

of jest, but as justifiable conclusions from Tolstoy's course of reasoning.

Whereas he derides, and with some fairness, all writers who place art upon the basis of beauty, inasmuch as beauty is dependent upon taste, and taste is variable, he stretches the truth over the point he himself deems important to the degree of selecting what works of art are infectious and therefore good and what are not and therefore bad.

"The feelings with which the artist infects others may be most varied; very strong or very weak, very important or very insignificant, very bad or very good; feelings of love for native land, self-devotion or submission to fate or to God expressed in drama, raptures of lovers described in a novel, feelings of voluptuousness expressed in a picture, courage expressed in a triumphal march, merriment evoked by a dance, humor evoked by a funny story, the feeling of quietness transmitted by an evening landscape or by a lullaby, or the feeling of admiration evoked by a beautiful arabesque—it is art. If only the spectators or auditors are infected by the feelings the author has felt, it is art."

This, therefore, leaves out of Tolstoy's calculation the question of the *quality* of the means of infection. The statement that *infection* is the only criterion by which art asserts itself and may be recognized, is absolute and unqualified. It would therefore come to pass that what infects one man fails to infect the next. To the one it is art, to the other not. One man is entirely indifferent to the story of an emotional

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

experience, the next is affected to tears. One finds no interest in the subject of a picture, another is not happy until he owns it.

In time the first man appreciates the story and the one lacking interest in the picture learns to esteem and even love it; but *per contra*, the first man changes his mind regarding the emotional story and in time calls it "rot," and the man who bought the picture quietly hangs it in the third-story guest room and later sells it at auction.

There have thereby been accomplished four changes of opinion as to what was art and what not — sufficient to prove that Tolstoy's foundation for art was naught but a *test* of it, and that at best an unsafe one.

The infection which may but feebly stand for the test of art is logically the *result of forces* working behind it. Tuberculosis infects; but what causes tuberculosis?

In short, then, art which "infects" accomplishes this because of certain properties inhering in it. Tolstoy nowhere speaks of these; but *that they do exist* is proved both from the result of their infection and the fact that mankind has felt the infection of the same works for generation after generation. This could not ensue unless these works possessed in themselves qualities denied to other works which have failed thus to infect us.

### III

The complete comprehension of art can best be had through its principles and these must be



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

run down by induction. Man has lived long enough to have established a reasonable criterion for his judgments and it is not begging the question to assert that a few principles of construction which may be named as underlying the great examples of the arts of prose and poetry, painting and sculpture, pure design and music are the necessary and infallible living principles upon which all art exists and *which prove their genuineness and vitality* by the infectiousness which draws all men together. It is the more to be deplored that having rendered such valuable service in clearing away the mold and leaf rot which has collected about the conception of art through centuries of philosophic writing, Tolstoy should in the end have reached his goal in a limp.

Let the reader imagine this possible case: In the same household dwell an artist and a young lady that paints. They both go forth with their sketching traps, but seek different subjects. The young lady establishes herself upon a gentle slope of land leading to a castle. The castle being the most important item in the scene before her, she places it in the centre of her canvas, trees and outbuildings occur about it, and beyond is a winding river. With thin color and cautious brush she traces the forms before her and extracts a semblance. As the afternoon wanes, a glow suffuses the sky and glorifies the castle wall. This added beauty the young lady quickly introduces into her canvas. The pink clouds lie softly in the gray-blue sky, and a little cadmium added upon the

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

original tone of the castle's stones gives a truly striking effect of departing day. She rises, backs away and views her performance with a thrill, and bearing it home in triumph displays it before the family. When set up in a good light the mother exclaims, "How beautiful!" and deeply affected by its loveliness sits tranquilly before it in a reverie. The father rises from his library chair and surveys the picture. "My daughter," says he, "you have truly found and depicted a beautiful subject. It has in it what Ruskin calls repose. It is picturesque in that it conforms to the definition of that term."

The young brother crowds in and ejaculates, "Say, that's bully! I don't know anything about art, but I know that gets me!"

The maid asks for a peep and stands for several moments speechless. Then she murmurs, "Now, isn't that fine? It makes me feel I would like to be there."

The young lady, meanwhile, now that she sees her picture indoors under a subdued light, acknowledges to herself that its shadows are heavy, that the lights look thin and lifeless, that the general tone, instead of possessing a buoyancy and brilliancy suggesting out of doors, seems brown. She, however, holds her own counsels and allows the work of infection to proceed.

At this point the artist returns and is called in to show what he has. The pictures are placed side by side. His subject is two figures discovered in an ash bank gathering from the

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

heaps of rubbish anything they account of value. The boy looks like a fit specimen for the juvenile court; the man's face is dirty and his hands begrimed with coal dust, a repulsive type of foreigner. About them lie rusting iron, tomato cans, broken bottles, and the suggestion of a dead cat.

Instantly the young lady acknowledges to herself that what she found lacking in her own picture this one possesses. The light on the varied surfaces is the light of day; the figures seem alive, squirming through the débris and clawing at the refuse. The two figures are so disposed on the canvas that they effect a striking pattern as a mass, and their clothes as notes of color are both harmonious and well related to the whole. She therefore exclaims, "Isn't that stunning!" The servant, reminded of the subject of labor, steals away to her own duties without comment. The boy remarks soberly, "I wouldn't want that job," and after a searching inspection at close range goes off whistling. The father of the family clears his throat and diplomatically avers that the last picture is certainly a strong bit of realism, "And yet," he continues after a pause, "if I read my Plato aright, the aim of art is the production of beauty, that which might fairly appeal to the æsthetic sense. Now it seems to me that you have brought out more of the degraded character of these people and their avocation than even reality demands, and in that you emphasized everything which opposes the idea of beauty."

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

The artist shrugs his shoulders: "I have never read a treatise on art, and in that I am derelict, but what I try to do is to extract just as much of the *character* of the subject as possible, and to make sure of it I hit it rather hard; in fact, I will admit I exaggerate it. This subject appealed to me not only because it is new and not hackneyed, but from its intrinsic interest of color, line, and contrast. These considerations are what we have to work with in the production of what you call beauty."

"Your admission of exaggeration calls to mind what I came across in Taine's 'Philosophy of Art' — namely, that 'beauty is the manifestation of the essential characteristics of a subject *more completely* than it is expressed in real life.' But it seems to me when it comes to a subject like this it is sufficient to be just true to facts. In fact, you might defend yourself on the old dictum of the philosophers, that beauty is truth and truth beauty."

"No," says the artist, "discussions concerning beauty never interested me because I never have once considered in all my professional career whether the thing I chose to paint was beautiful or not. All I care for is whether the subject is interesting enough to me to be painted and good enough to be accepted by the jury after it is painted."

"But," says the mother, "we have so many horrible things occurring every day about us that we do not need art to perpetuate them, but rather to turn our thoughts away from them and toward the realm of beauty."

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

“Well, madam,” says the artist, as he gathers up his traps and picture, “it seems as though that ought to be right. It sounds like good doctrine, and I presume it would be better if the figure painters taught lessons of morality in their work and the landscape painters dealt in the most beautiful aspects of nature. It occurs to me I have somewhere seen that almost all the philosophers claim the vocation of art is to inculcate morals.”

A month later the two pictures were sent to the Academy. The young lady had been given a copy of Tolstoy's “What Is Art?” and, discovering that the proof of art is “infection,” recalled the infectious impression her canvas had made upon the family.

When its turn came before the jury the attendant did not quite get it on to the easel. The jury caught a glimpse of it upside down, but that was enough. A weary wave of the hand was sufficient, and the other attendant with the red chalk inscribed a circle on the back. The “Rag Pickers” attracted the prompt attention of the committee, some of whom applauded, while others crowded the easel during a brief moment for a closer view.

The conclusions, self-evident, assist us at least to know where not to look for the gauge and measure of art.

## IV

One to whom we are indebted more than the public is aware for the practical elucidation of

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

the principles of art is François Delsarte, whose lifework has been made to serve the utilities of personal grace and tragic action.

Delsarte, like Socrates, was a philosopher whose teachings are preserved for us through his disciples. His profoundest public utterance was made in an address before the Philotechnic Society of Paris. In this he rode roughshod at the academic methods of French art instruction, exposing by ridicule the fact that their masters possessed no standard of art nor clear conception of its meaning. As a student, he declared he found himself in a house divided against itself, each one of his instructors giving him contradictory advice.

“When I asked for a principle, a law, a reason, my questions were invariably lost in the void.”

“Æsthetics will be at length truly constituted under the *severe forms of a positive science*,” was his prophecy. “To know what he ought to seek, the artist needs an exactly formulated definition of art, its object, its aim, its means. This definition, to be practical, should carry the irrefragable character of a demonstration. Art is at once the knowledge, the possession and free direction of agents by virtue of which are revealed life, mind, and soul. It is application knowingly appropriated of the sign to the thing, an application of which the triple object is to move, to convince, and to persuade. Art is not, as is said, an imitation of nature. It elevates in idealizing her; it is the synthetic rapport of scattered beauties of nature to a superior and definite type.”

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

This definition of art is a true and natural reflex of the Delsartean notion founded on the Greek antique, which he claimed was the infallible basis for a correct comprehension.

A shorter definition from him is, "Art is emotion passed through thought and fixed in form."

One may well share the author's regret in not finding his way clear to accept this definition of Delsarte, which with its recommendation of simplicity in terms and clarity of idea has been for many years by common consent the most acceptable definition to artists. "Art is emotion passed through thought and fixed in form."

Two objections, however, lie against it; the lesser, the fact that no idea of pleasure in the product is suggested, a point considered so necessary by the great majority of writers on art as to be almost universally incorporated in their definitions and dignified by some of them to the extent of its being the theme of entire volumes or special essays. The more important objection lies in the notion that art is emotion.

That art may well plant its roots in the well springs of emotion no one will deny nor argue on the comparative excellencies of such art as is emotive and such as is not. By common consent the world receives more of this necessary pleasure which art may give from emotional work than from the coldly classic, but it is only a Bunthorne who asserts that classicism has no place in art because it neither has its seat in emotion nor excites it in the beholder.

One may read Macaulay and well imagine

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

that the form of utterance fell, entirely shaped, from his intellectual apparatus with no more effort on the part of the emotions than that suggested by the machine of the mint which drops its exquisitely graven dollars as a result of perfected machinery. Given the materials, the idea, the brain of the writer applies the principles of his art so instinctively that the process is entirely an intellectual one. The choice to us, however, is between this sort of product and that produced, for instance, by Victor Hugo, Walt Whitman or Jean Jacques Rousseau in which varied grades of emotion are traceable; and no less an opportunity for judgment of the essence of art exists in a comparison of David with Millet, Holman Hunt with Delacroix, Gérôme with Gauguin, the conventional portrait statue of a Pharaoh with the martial group of Rude on the *Arc de Triumph*. To deny the qualities of art to the unemotional works of the above brief list would be to deny the basis of all art which those works surely possess.

We speak of the emotion of the actor and know it to mean that which has added a quality to the utterance, or of the emotion of the orator and know it to mean not the source of the thought, but the spring whereat the thought has imbibed added inspiration and has thereby received an added glory.

Instead of emotion being the base and thought its modification, thought necessarily becomes the base and this is modified in varying degrees by emotion.



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

Had Delsarte shaped his definition to read: Art is thought passed through emotion and fixed in form, the conditions which most frequently exist would have been covered.

In music, which is the most emotional of the arts, the creation may often be intuitive, but can one deny the title of art to such music as is distinctly imitative? The theme founded on a bird's carol where, as we know, the composer has striven to be mimetic; or upon the chants of the American Indian or of the Negro, where the study is to secure representative character, has surely not emotion for its base. The ideas thus supplied may pass through the emotive processes and thereby gain that quality which would raise its value as art.

Art, therefore, is not absolute: it is an influence *acting in degree*; whether one's philosophy determines that emotion precedes thought or thought stimulates emotion, the gist of the matter lies this side that controversy. Art has only to do with the last clause of the Delsartian definition. It has only to do with *thought's fixation in form*, and with its quality.

### V

The Law of Trinity Delsarte states as follows, declaring that the principle of this system is contained therein: "Three expressions are requisite for the formation of the Trinity, each presupposing and implying the other two. There must be absolute co-necessity between them. Thus, the three principles of our being,

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

life, mind, and soul, form a trinity. Why? Because life and mind are one and the same soul, soul and mind are one and the same life, life and soul are one and the same mind."

The intellect, mental imagery, and feeling are the real motor forces, the personality or mask; the physical organism being nothing more than the external medium for their manifestation. In exact proportion to the strength and range of this trinity within, are we enabled to express the heights and depths of human feeling. To place ourselves en rapport with the idea or thing, to create a living image of it in the mind and reproduce it with the vividness of its own natural life, is the essence of Delsarte's formula. The three fundamental principles of the Delsarte system in constructive art are opposition, sequence, and poise. Opposition is to motion what harmony is to music; sequence is to motion what melody is to music, poise in combination of the two, being the account of time in the art of expression.

The fact that Delsarte, doubtless under the influence of Swedenborg, has seen fit to expand his system on the basis of the Trinity has seemingly made it necessary to limit the principles of art to three. These, he discovers, are expressed in all the great antiques, the *poise* or repose being the result of *opposition* and *sequence*. For the construction of the single figure these are sufficient, but Delsarte's studies seem limited to this simple range of art. Other and even more important principles loom up immediately the idea of construction is applied

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

to many elements. Principality, relativity, subordination, congruity, to mention but a few, knock at the door of this system and receive no response.

Like Tolstoy, whose larger view of art seemed bedimmed by his intense focalizing upon his own art of literature and the moral possibilities which this presented, Delsarte seems satisfied to settle the capacities of universal art on the basis of the human figure and its coördination with man's mental and spiritual states.

To Delsarte every piece of ancient sculpture was the embodiment of an idea or a sentiment, and was produced on the principle that ideas are eternal and constitute the only divine part of the human soul, and that between the mental states corresponding to ideas and their physical expression there is perfect correspondence. This he felt to be the grand idea of the ancients both in their philosophy and their art. The law he defines as the Law of Correspondence.

## CHAPTER VIII

### BODY, SOUL, AND SPIRIT

“Imitation will carry you but a short way. Personification contains the Promethean spark.”

THE work of art, the picture and the piece of sculpture, or of music, the poem, the decoration and some architecture, has each one, *body* and *soul*, like the man who created it and whom, in varying degree, it bodies forth, an expression in part of his body and soul. “Art is nature with the man added,” nay, but rather, *Art is man with nature added*, the addition a branch grafted into the parent trunk, by whose strength it lives. It is the stock on which this is placed rather than the stem itself which gives value to the graft. This is quickly proved when the same excerpt from nature is interpreted by one artist or another. Under the hand of one it lives and under the other it dies. That which man adds is art, for nature seen in a mirror is surely not art. The human element supplies therefore the real value. Now as no two men talk alike or write alike, certainly no two men paint alike. The individual mode of expression is the gauge of value. There is no other, even though for a time the wise in art may not listen, and confound the unknown voice with that of a babbler groping his way in the dark-



IN THE GROTTA — *Hindu*

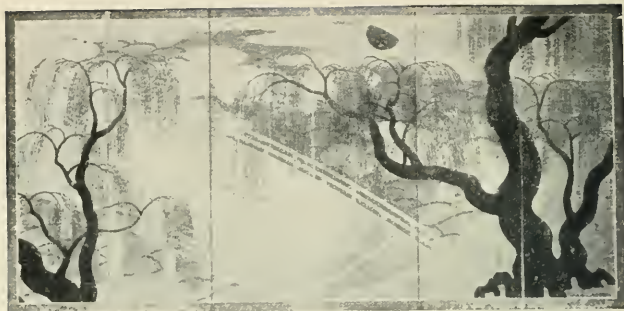


WINTER LANDSCAPE  
*Attributed to the Emperor Huitsung*



THE GAME — *Tang-Ying*

HINDU AND CHINESE ART



THE BRIDGE — *Kano Yeitoku*



THE PILGRIMAGE — *Hokusai*



PAWLOXIA AND CHRYSANTHEMUM — *Hoitsu*

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

ness. The unknown voice may be found to have a message, and with the names of Paul Potter, Goya, Delacroix, Corot, Millet, Puvis de Chavannes, Monet, Pissarro, and Cézanne in mind, modern criticism is more timid if not more liberal and lenient, in its attitude toward these new and uncertain sounds.

In fact, the liberality of the present is largely accountable for most of the crimes now committed under the caveat and protection of this modern bid for originality, and the striving of those who wish to be heard is rather concerned to proclaim something in a new tongue, than with the worth or quality of its message. But in all this, the modern tendency to accept the individual in art and lay stress upon his personality has drawn attention to the *larger interest that art possesses*. The true analysis of any work of art must include this, especially when the work seeks to express mental and not merely the imitable qualities. Superficially its subject or story may be the only thing observable, as with many a contact in human life, in the converse of man with man, we discover and grasp but a part of what was there.

Beyond this, however, the reflex of another mind may hold two distinct possibilities. If man is a union of body, soul, and spirit, why should not the thing into which man has poured all of these divisions of himself possess them? The "body" contains the constituent parts, the materials of form, composition, color. The "soul" is the animating principle through which the materials are quickened into

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

life. It is the manner, the phrasing, the differentiation between one man's method and another's. It is the individual note to which the elements are attuned. It therefore means style. It has to do with methods, with technique. It signifies personal distinction. It is therefore epitomized in the single word *individuality*. This, of course, embraces the emotional quality of the work of which technique and construction are the visible signs. Soul has to do only with the human end of the performance.<sup>1</sup>

Spirit is an essence which associates itself with body, a natural development through soul and may or may not inhere in a work of art. In these correspondences, the first or physical state stands for Life, the second or expressive state for the Soul, the third or spiritual state, for that which may spring from a union of the other two.

## II

The case thus far may be explained over a piece of still-life. The group of objects set before the student concerns him only as to its form and color. He must shape the orange and apple in character and exactly match the hue of each. When he has accomplished this, his task is complete. In this the artisan has proceeded with his tools cleverly, and when with advancing skill he paints a roll of bills so

<sup>1</sup> "Not all the laws of the universe," declares Mr. Ruskin, "will enable you to draw a line or see a color without that singular force anciently called the soul."



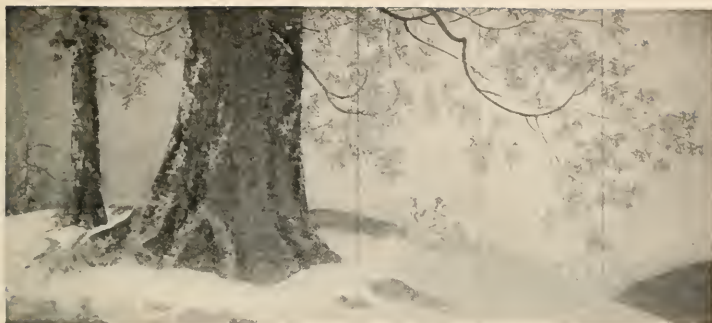
## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

that it deceives the multitude and it is bought for \$500 by the proprietor of a saloon, and is declared one of the greatest works of art of the century, he justly feels that he has reached the top — and so he has — of the first stage; but there are three. The second degree is attained over the same set of objects, but by some other man whose added experience has caused him to believe that imitation is but an arbitrary demand of art and that the personal quality is more valuable. With this point of view, the master looks over the subject and while emphasizing every consideration which the student thought essential, places that other thing to the fore, so that in rendering the subject each stroke partakes of the man himself. The work when finished is, therefore, personal; whereas the first must be signed for identification, the other requires no signature, except to the dealer who knows its value. It becomes “a Vollon” or “a Chase,” *the while* becoming fruit or fish.

But the last stage is impossible to this subject. Spirit cannot inhere in either fruit or fishes, and from this it might be inferred that only the subject of *man*, possessed of a spirit, could accommodate it; but on the contrary the inanimate trees and sky and fields may be its hiding place, for here man may find communion through the common bond which unites him with the eternal. He may apprehend the divinity which presides there, the “Kokaro” of the Japanese, whom their artists so zealously seek to discover. He may find in the sentiment

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

which at times broods over the fields, among the trees or in the sky something which grasps and holds his own spirit. It is with the body that the school has most to do, that which makes the copy "look like." This mere identification of things because of likeness plays so large a part in the effort of most academies that a well-trained student comes out of them thinking he has thereby proved himself an artist. The fact is, however, the student who has learned to draw and paint has been studying science, not art. Art has yet to be induced, and she may or may not attach herself to his science. It is, in short, possible to paint subjects with the scientific knowledge and get them only into the lowest range. They may express only "body." Take whatsoever subject, from a landscape to a nativity, it may easily speak chiefly of an intense effort to make the individual parts right, to such a degree, in fact, that this is the insistent impression on the beholder. He is obliged to observe separate items, each in itself right and each existing in defiance of concord *through sacrifice*, on which art is built. Have we not seen the head of a saint or an angel, the only impression from which is the artist's effort to *get it right*, and with no whit of the spiritual quality which saints and angels should possess? Beyond this point of right drawing and right color the artist takes a step which separates him from the student. He not only puts "soul" into it — he may spiritualize it. The first is attained by putting himself into it, the second by putting it



SCREEN PAINTING — *Terasaki Kogyo*



THE RACE TRACK — *Takahashi Koko*



THE JOURNEY — *Kawai Gyokudo*

MODERN JAPANESE PAINTING



TIGERS IN SNOW — *Ohashi Suiseki*



A SPRING SHOWER — *Kawai Gyokudo*



THE BREEZE — *Nada Sauro*

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

out of the particular into the general class, causing, in short, the *man* to stand for *mankind* or some attribute expressive of a general truth.

It would be a matter worth debating, as to which is the more endurable, a work which has good body and no soul or spirit, or the soul and spirit with a feeble body. The latter has been shown us in the art of the primitives or the modern pre-Raphaelites, which always excites our sympathy and occasionally our interest.

Between this and the classic cold truth of David or Prudhon there is yet a wide range in which the larger proportion of art moves and has its being. As with the inert clay which in the beginning resembled man, the breath of life was necessary before it could become a living spirit, so the semblance of reality may stand and wait for the subtle something which its creator has the ability to supply.

When we examine a work of art for the quality of "soul," let us be sure of the meaning of the term, that it be not confounded with a higher quality. The term signifies life, personal and responsive.

The actor in knowing his lines has the *body* of his discourse, but his expression of them adds a value which in the degree of this expression gives us his rating. The musician is supplied with a score which has intrinsic value, but he adds to this value through interpretation. The painter confronts a subject supplied out of nature, history, or poetry. How he passes on his impression of it is to us the sign of his distinction.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

In this range, then, exist those differences which make one man's work sought for on every hand and the other man's work a drug on the market. Shall it be described as charm, such as we encounter in the conversation of certain people, and which is all lacking in that of others — that would seem the nearest analogy from the simplest of the arts, conversation.

Granted the story-telling, illustrative quality of a work to be the practical quality, and that the personal equation may affect this but little for him who wishes to read *as he runs*, it must still be remembered that the *real people* for whom art is created are not those who have to read as they run, and the best judgments concerning it are made by those who have time to sit down over against it and think about it. For them, the subject is quickly dispatched, but the lasting pleasure lies in the how, the why, the why this and the why not that, of personal selection and expression. This has all to do with the second or soul division of the work and upon it the majority of modern painters expend their energy. Realism is close-hauled to the fewest possible conditions — character, color, and light, but its commands are inexorable; although it permits entire freedom for the expression of temperament.

### III

That the work of art contains a capacity beyond the material, however, endows it with a supreme significance. Just here Mr. Steven-

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

son's illustration comes to mind. It is the case of the juggler with the oranges. While he keeps two in the air he fascinates and pleases us; with three going we marvel; at four we are enthralled. The tossing of a single orange is on a par with the life-class drawing. Here the student is merely becoming acquainted with oranges, a necessary introduction to the art of juggling.

Through his reticence toward a display of the material in landscape, Mr. Twachtman has made us feel the spiritual essence which he persistently pushed to the fore. It was not Smith's farm on Willow Creek, but rather the spirit of Winter or of Springtime; the farmhouse and the creek merely incidents which aided his larger intention.

The later work of Charles H. Davis expresses a like character; impressions of a day's walk but of no particular place — a mood evoked by viewing nature during a whole morning, and expressive of sensation rather than particularized fact.

By no means is this final thing limited to those who evolve their pictures from stored-up knowledge, as may be witnessed by such real poets of landscape who, while working in her presence, under the dictation of the intense realistic impression, are still able to fasten upon this quality.

In figure painting, the idealism of a generation ago has entirely passed, but a new and better sort is now appearing. It is not a portrait of the artist's wife and children which we

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

accept from Mr. Brush, but rather the larger theme of motherhood and the family. The ideal, in its emancipation from the realistic, breaks upward and enters the larger field.

Granted, however, that every effect must have its cause, it is for the insistent student of art to run down these qualities which are singled out as admirable and to know whereby they become effective. Leaving out the academic qualities, imitative form and color, the thing that remains after such elimination is largely what makes art valuable. It is the difference, for instance, between the pictures of Jean François Millet and those of his son, also a painter of French peasants, a gentleman living in affluence on the results of the post-mortem sale of his father's effects. Each has put his life into his art and the world decides in favor of the art through which the soul emits its fragrance when crushed; the one *whose experience has rendered it truly emotional*. The sunny cottages and smiling peasants of the other's art barely more than qualify in the range of body. Its personality at best is commonplace.

Personal art becomes more interesting and hence more valuable through its separation not only from all other art, but from the contact imprint of nature herself. This element of separation marks all great achievement.

And how is this expressed? Largely by construction and somewhat by technique. In these ranges the artist asserts himself, modeling nature with the confidence of a potter with his clay, and



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

giving expression to her facts in such manner as seemeth him best.

His domination does not result in the belittling of nature. The contest in which he becomes winner proves the fitting place which mind commands as related to matter.

Supreme over these considerations broods the spirit, ready like the Pentacostal dove to descend and glorify that which is fitted for a higher service.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE GENESIS OF ART

“The ideal rises out of a felt contrast of what we are and what we long to be.”

MAN first has a philosophy and then an art, and as man's philosophy is usually the outgrowth of his religion, it has come to pass that art is reflective of both.

What a man thinketh so is he, in all his expressions, including art. Where Greek art touched the Egyptian it recoiled from its formalism as from a corpse. Hand bound as this was by a system conventionalized through the formalism of an absolute monarchy, it was an art executed by command not of the artist's will, but that of his master.<sup>1</sup> To the Greek mind life meant freedom, freedom within the perfect circle of that high-minded philosophy which became for them the law of life.

The keenly analytical philosophies which were subjects of popular discussion sought to clear the world of mystery rather than foster it.

<sup>1</sup> “The sausage shaped columns of Egyptian temples and the shapeless entablatures, so blind to all structural purpose, so intellectually unconscious of their relation and proportion to each other, have seemed the mere expression of the state of intellectual insensibility in which they were conceived, and were equally significant of a state of being in which the power of conscious observation and analysis was altogether dormant.” — L. M. Phillips, in his “Art and Environment.”

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

Their wise men argued for absolute analysis in which the statement should be so clear as to guard itself from attack at any point. They observed the subject from every angle; they, in short, insisted on its form.

Adding to the political and mental freedom of the Greek their stimulating, sobering, qualifying, organizing philosophy; and to that again the positive and strangely familiar notion of deity, developed into the tangible personalities of the deities, and we have a basis such as never before was offered as a stage for the action of art.

How natural that a perfectly poised intellectuality should have created without hesitation a perfectly formed notion of its idea. Greek philosophy was bounded by the senses, and strove by their aid to construct a system concerning the visible world. This sufficed, and the most important member in their aggregation of things — Man — was set forth in his absolute perfection. The gods, elevated but slightly above his station, were his archetypes in whom his slight imperfections were completely adjusted and set right.

With suggestions for gods and goddesses to be seen at every turn of the street, the opportunity to absorb not only the subject of their art but its inspiration by daily contact, offers a reason for their creation of a standard which for two score centuries the world has accepted as universal.

Quite as much in his architecture as in his sculpture was the Greek artist a reflex of this

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

same pronounced philosophy, this rightness of mind. The Parthenon in its perfected unity is an aggregation of minor perfections, governed first by mathematical formulas of proportion and finally dominated by the greater consideration of an appeal to the eye, which necessitated setting columns out of plumb to make them look vertical, or raising at the centre the long lines of the temple's platform to correct the common optical error of seeing such lines slightly concave.

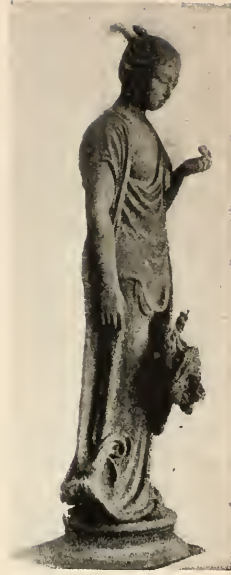
It was, again, a part of the philosophy of the senses, the effect upon them being of more importance than absolute exactitude, the first notable exception to the doctrine that beauty is truth.

Leaving this base line of art, which by common consent is conceded, we penetrate the East to find art in the embrace of mysticism and idealism, a result of that philosophy; and to the West to find the philosophy of the middle ages shaping the channel which later received the flood of the Renaissance, a philosophy which strove to confine religious faith with naturalistic rationalism, interpreting divine truth by man-made formula.

The art of it was conspicuously of this sort. The feast of Cana of Galilee becomes with Paul Veronese a Venetian fête, altar pieces were incidentally opportunities for making saints of art patrons, "The Last Judgment" and "Inferno" give Dante and Michael Angelo a chance to roast their enemies; here religion was royally entertained under the conditions which happened to exist.



HOBBY HORSE — *Y. Chōun*



"SEIJA" — *Homei*



THE MOON — *Yonchara Unkai*



WOODCARVING — *H. Deuchū*

WESTERN INFLUENCE IN JAPANESE SCULPTURE



BATTERSEA BRIDGE — *Whistler*



THE GUITAR — *Manet*

JAPANESE INFLUENCE IN OCCIDENTAL ART

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

With modern philosophy man becomes the centre, the endeavor being to harmonize in him and to him the world we see; no longer man in his perfection as with the Greeks but man as he is; man in his multiform capacities and interests.

At once then art becomes decentralized. It moves restlessly in many directions. It analyzes, experiments. The present is an age of science with its command to know.

The faith of the Humanists glorified with its divine aureole the art of the Renaissance. The painter and sculptor accepted his commission with a simple belief in his subject. Faith therefore conquered.

The present, rejoicing in the radiance of the many-eyed Argus, has lost the eye single; it has exchanged for its desire to know all things, the simple joy of belief. The past, however, can be useful for no better purpose than a background, the actions of the present taking place in front of this. If our age has become aggressive by reason of its insistence to know, the wise man of to-day must accept the exchange of this simple joy of the past for the rational order of pleasure which charms by its greater truth.

To his contemplation the great scroll of art is unrolled. He finds himself in his true perspective, the last item in its unfolding, and before he may judge of his own age and his own place therein, his eye must have traversed the whole.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

### II

In all ages those who produce art have usually done so because some one else wanted it: art for art's sake people are very few. Art has existed because some one could pay the artist, which is really her justification, proving that art has been able to take root and expand because she is needed. Were this not so, we would return to an undecorated, inexpressive life. Utility would be the compass of our practical demand and unadorned expression our habit. Instead of this in every nation there has been the artist.

He was the orator who stirred men's blood, the poet whose song was phrased so that men got a new vision out of common speech, the artisan who gave to what he wrought an uncommon turn at which men smiled in pleasure. All this was not necessary but yet enjoyable, and so it was allowed to stay, indeed art has always been encouraged to remain.

But art has ever demanded leisure. "Art," as Ruskin declares, "is incompatible with hurry." Indeed it is really more at home in a pueblo village than among the blast furnaces of Pittsburgh or Birmingham. One might wait from the creation to the millennium for art to evince itself under the conditions of a factory whistle at seven and a return of the workers at nightfall, with houses for the operators all of one shape and plainness, with no opportunity for beauty's influence and no time for her contemplation.



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

That art should be so simple that it can appeal to the common man in the hurry and rush of his unsympathetic life was Tolstoy's ambition for it. But art is no more intended for a man who has no time for *it* than is religion or any other good thing.

The nations, then, which had time for æsthetic thought and in whose philosophy of life was a place reserved for idealism, are those where she has really sustained herself, growing and unfolding the wonderful capacities which lie in the simple conception of the *thing beautiful*.

With leisurely civilization art had an early birth. The contemplation of religious belief was soon made tangible and expressed in symbol. The world had always had a yearning to see God, and among man's first attempts at representation was an effort to express either deity or persons and things closely allied.

From the Sphinx, the world's earliest monument, one may trace the unfolding of art along the line of contemplation of the abstract idea, art expressions which have to do either with divinity or man's immortality. The presence of these impassive monuments gave assurance to a belief in the unseen, and the unseen was made impressive because of the æsthetic and psychological qualities which they guarded.

This habit of contemplation, which the religions of all ethnic peoples cultivated, fostered likewise the possibilities of art; and from the day of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the King set up to the Madonna and Child of Christian Europe, the great proportion of art

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

was idealistic; it was the idea embodied in such form as to make man's contemplation more easy. As art pushed eastward from the centre of earliest civilization, toward the nations whose religion was shaped by Buddha, Zoroaster, and Confucius, repose, one of the highest qualities of religious effort, became the dominant one of their art, affecting all types of it — architecture, sculpture and painting. In fact, so deep-seated and necessary was this quality held that the landscape of the Chinese was founded upon the notion of reverie.

Imitation to these peoples has always had but secondary consideration, and everything which impinged upon the larger quality was either mitigated or left out. The great period of scroll and screen painting of the Sung Ming and T'ang Dynasties was characterized by the breadth and magnitude of their subjects. If with its attempt at perfected detail the theme awakened no thoughts of sublimity, nor produced a calm and tranquil impression, the work with them had no rating. It must above all prove able to lead one out of himself into the universal life. It must supply hints of the infinite, whisperings from esoteric sources and naturally join hands with their philosophy of life.

We therefore cannot look at much of this early art without quickly inferring that realism was of small moment, realities serving only in the capacity of pegs on which to hang ideas, sensations, emotions. Here we have mountains in the abstract, steep and oftentimes impassable, rising out of the mists and piercing



THE FORGE — *Mortimer Mepes*



THE BAMBOO FENCE — *Helen Hyde*  
Colored Wood Engraving Executed in Japan

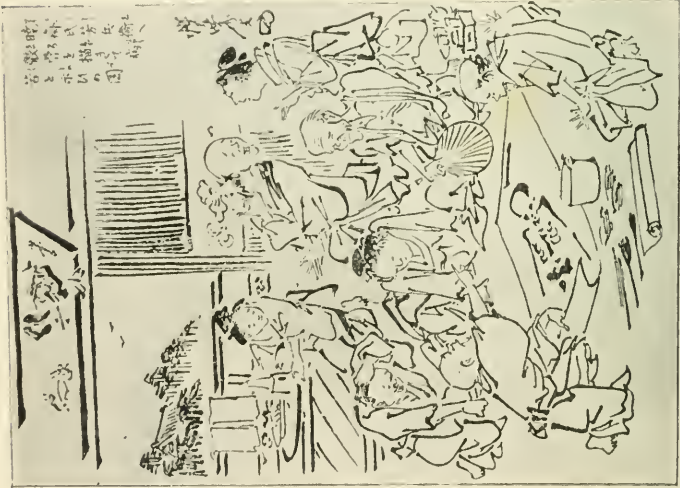
THE JAPANESE SUBJECT BY THE WESTERNER



MODERN



WASHERS — Toyokuni



DRAWING — Kiosai

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

them again, but leaving an emotion of sublimity; of rivers in which the impression was that of swift-moving currents; of waterfalls coming from nowhere and disappearing without explanation; of mysterious and conventionalized cloud forms, in outlined strata, invading the land and leaving only glimpses here and there of meadow, lake, or mountainside; of the ocean tossed and turbid in wildly fantastic wave forms, but expressive of the abstract idea of movement and intense commotion. With these painters the essence of the theme was of chief concern. The notion of transmigration of soul, passing from Egypt through India and into China and Japan, invested the philosophies of all these peoples with the idea of the *spirit in the thing*.

In the rendition of the object the first requisite was to find *the way of its life*. If it be a flower, a tree, a river, an animal, the ocean, or even a locality, to find its mode of growth and existence was imperative in the procedure of the artist. In short, the majority of the native critics of the celestial kingdom agree that the echo of the spirit, or spiritual tone, is the highest essential in painting.

### III

The six canons in Chinese art are: Spiritual tone and life movement; manner of brush work in lines; form in relation to objects; choice of colors appropriate to objects; composition; copying of classic masterpieces.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

Chinapin, although urging a close scrutiny of form, declared it to be impossible to paint waves, because ever changing, and so in place thereof we behold all degrees of moving chaos. Strange their faithful observation of nature did not reveal the simple logic of marine form; that because one plane is, another must be; and that practically every third wave repeats itself and every seventh is of the largest size, and therefore to the student easily studied. Instead, witness the *mélange* of forms representing the sea by Korin, acknowledged as one of the greatest painters of Japan.

Although numerous characteristics may be discovered separating the Chinese and Japanese peoples, in their art they are practically united; in fact, the latter was a development of the former, the art of each passing through a long classic period. The sages and critics of the Sung period were replaced by the "Lofty Talkers" and the "Wise Men of the Bamboo Grove," of Japan, who maintained for art the ancient traditions.

The philosophy of art, its methods and technique were identical. The kinship in the result is therefore not surprising. Critics agree, however, that, all things considered, the older country produced the better art.

In every nation one can trace the abstract idea in art (idealism) working side by side with the concrete idea, mere imitation produced either for the sake of personal record or in illustration of an event.

Whereas in Egypt the Sphinx was a symbol,

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

the portrait statues of the kings were records, as were the sculptured reliefs upon the walls of Karnak or from the Book of the Dead, from the Assyrian temples of Nimrud and Khorsabad, wherein art was used for no æsthetic effect primarily, but wherein these and most other cases, the results of the utilitarian efforts *proved to be æsthetic*.

In the case of the portrait statues of Egypt, these may be classed as idealizations, but it must not be forgotten that idealism and conventionalism approach so closely at times as to confuse their identity. Deprived of those lines of construction which mean life and which even in repose are the secret of charm in all Greek sculpture, they have been created, one the counterpart of another, on an arbitrary formula. With the basic idea of their construction, frontality, depriving the image of action and emotion, naught is left but the possibility of these attributes, and the result is the symbol of a once living and active man.

### IV

Although the strong trend was ever toward idealism, in time, into oriental art came the influence of realism, the thing imitated for its own sake, because it was a part of nature.

Century after century had held this in check in the art of India, China, and Japan, for although in each of these arts the painting of actual scenes in the mythology of their times is preserved for us, this is not the realism of

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

the *world about us*, but the reality of fancy or belief. As an exception to this, however, must be cited the love of animal nature expressed with remarkable realism in Assyrian sculpture.

What is known in Japanese art as Ukiyoye, or "pictures of the fleeting world," a term of Buddhistic reproach, came in with Matahei, who, born in 1578, may be accounted the father of Japanese genre. Before his time religion, allegory, painting of the symbols (the dragon always expressive of water, the tiger of land, etc.), war, mythology, and portraiture had been the compass of art's subject. With him the everyday life as a theme was added to this list, and yet, together with his purely genre subject, Matahei spent many years depicting the legendary goddesses and heroes, and his series of the Thirty-Six Poets, done in black, is regarded his most important work. Together with Okyo, a powerful draughtsman, who, like him, had been influenced by some Dutch engravings brought to Nagasaki, these two in time established the realistic movement in Japan, breaking with the formal tradition of Chinese art. The freedom in the depiction of life around them soon became an irresistible temptation to painters and the Ukiyoye, or "Common" school. This, however, did not become thoroughly popular until the invention of wood engraving at about 1680. Up to that time the art of the orient had been a privilege of the rich, screen and scroll paintings often representing months and even a year's labor.

With the process of reproduction, art for the



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

people was initiated and, although many artists of the highest rank went into this newer branch, the traditions in both China and Japan are such that only until recently were the print artists recognized as having any standing. Socially they were for generations rated with the mechanics.

The craze of Europe and America over the Japanese print is wholly incomprehensible to the kakemono painters of Japan. Mr. H. P. Bowie, in his charming book on Japanese art, declares that never in his visits to the studios of the important painters of Japan (and he has visited them all) did he come upon a Japanese print. The painters regard them as the efforts of four men, in which the original intention of the artist suffers much. The engraver, the color smearer, and the printer all work quite independently of the designer, who never oversees the work. In Japan the market for them is entirely among the lower classes. But it nevertheless has naturally come to pass that the names of the great draughtsmen of the block are known the world round, while they of the scroll and the screen are now only sparingly receiving their introduction through the constricted channel of those publications dealing with their classic art.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fortunately there has been cultivated sufficient popular interest in these older painters of the scroll and screen, to make possible such a publication as the "Kokka," a magazine de luxe of oriental art, and others of more modest pretensions. The works, therefore, of Chinese and Japanese antiquity may be seen in reduced size, and some notion of the great artists of the Northern and Southern schools of China be obtained.

Of the former, Kuo Hsi, Ma Yuan, Li T'ang, Li ssu-hsun,

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

While Moronobu, Kunisada, Goshichi, Utamaro, Toyokuni, Chosun, Toyoharu, Kiyonage, Haronobu, who declared, "Though I work in prints I will style myself the master painter of Japan," Hoitsu, Kitagawa, Hiroshige and Hokusai are names very familiar to any collector or student of Japanese print art, the masters of the Tosa and Kano schools of Japan or the Hangchow artists of Sung Dynasty of China who have left behind them art exceeding these others, are practically unknown, reproductions of their works being limited to very expensive editions which are but recently appearing.

Ching Hao and Chon ch'en are most notable, and of the Southern school Wau Meng, Mi Fu, and Fau Kuan.

The pictures of the north express the boldness, amplitude, and freedom of their vast mountain ranges; those of the south are wrought in the more delicate fibre sweetened and gracious influences of the valley lands.

## CHAPTER X

### THE ÆSTHETICS OF CHINESE AND JAPANESE ART

“In short, the effort of art is to interpret the workings of the human spirit.” — *J. A. Symonds.*

ONE cannot approach these oriental arts in the spirit of criticism without assuming the conditions for himself under which they were produced. The idealism, pervasive of all eastern philosophy, must first be acknowledged, and the first condition must be the first great canon of idealism, that the idea is initial, and the fact of secondary importance.

Facts, thus regarded, must in time become conventionalized; they serve as symbols; they stand for ideas, just as, though in lesser degree, the characters of picture writing were transmuted into letters.

The *way* to do things was pressed out in a mold which had the whole nation at the end of the leverage. Only occasionally in the long history of the world's most consecutive art do we find an artist ready to start in an untried direction. The criticism by a patron so wounded the sense of conventional fitness of the art of a Tokyo painter that after refusing to make the desired change he committed *hari-kari*. In such a land we are not surprised to find a long code of *Art Laws* which every student of art must learn and practise.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

The Japanese preserve to this day a practice in eighteen different formative lines, as, for example, the line wrinkled like a horse's teeth, that like a folded belt, that like a bullock's hair, that like a frayed rope, that like eddying water, that like a thunder head, etc. These all are applied to the draperies of certain orders; the nobleman has his, the beggar his, the saint, the philosopher, the woman of the aristocracy, the geisha, all have their distinctive lines; there must be no confounding of these. Running water has its line, the cataract has likewise its distinctive line. Branch forms require varied lines; the hand and arm being held in given postures to produce these and the brush supplied with little or less water as the character of the bark may be smooth or rough.

Rock strata are of course lineal, and are produced by as many given lines as may be discerned in surface geology.

The whole art system has stood for generations waiting for the next painter — it is indeed only one system of many in the land of systems — but in its ample yoke he has room to move in almost any direction. Were these technical conventions loosened and this art given an unbridled rein, free of all conditions, who will not say that much of its greatest claim on our interest and sympathies would disappear?

Indeed, the study or casual contemplation of this art leaves us with a satisfied feeling that the system has been well thought out. It pleases, nay, often amuses us, and thereby charms. We

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

are led captive, bound by its handcuffs, willing prisoners.

But those who have witnessed a kakemono in process can add to this enchantment another and greater. The mastery of technique of which the painting informs us, in actual process enthalls us as does the exhibition of any of their magic arts. There is no hesitation, for the conception is re-conception. It proceeds straight from the mental reservoirs along the conduits of nerve, tendon and muscle, emitting its constant and never-failing stream. We thank the conventions for being present, for the precedents established centuries before and found to be good during all succeeding periods; we praise a system which makes perfect through practice.

The paper or silk is placed on the floor; by his side the artist has a few bowls of liquid color, the soft pliable brushes, each coming to a point, are held at arm's length. The stroke may be a combination movement of shoulder, arm, and wrist; it must frequently be a graduated stroke, the brush being rolled so that the color grades itself, as in the bamboo. At times two brushes are held in the same hand, manipulated by different fingers and often loaded with separate colors. Under these conditions there must be no such word as fail, for the false stroke cannot be eliminated. Quick and ingenious devices, however, are ever present for foiling adverse fate.

In an attempt on the part of the writer before a distinguished painter of Japan to produce a landscape by this method, his clumsiness let

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

fall across the sky three graduated spots of gray color.

"I have spoiled that one!" I ejaculated, as I laid down the brush. But my silent observer smilingly picked it up and, touching wings and heads to my spots, set me going again.

With these quick, lightning-like strokes, delivered with the freedom of a full arm swing, the subtle intricacies of form are often slurred. Form must be known as a generality and rendered in the abstract. There is no other way. The special features of eyes, nose, and mouth are conventionalized, especially the nose, which even in purported likenesses is a truly conventionalized character; drapery has been reduced to formula, and the avoidance of embarrassing complications where disparate lines touch or masses blend has all been settled long ago by convention.

The writer once urged a Chinese artist of his acquaintance, who for a long period had executed scrolls of a like sort, to look over a hand-book on perspective and one also on figure drawing. His attachment of hands to wrists and feet to ankles was in the true conventionalized manner of *curves*, observable in both Chinese and Japanese art, and always the same. This failure to depict Nature as she is was pointed out, but he politely refused all suggestion and both books, and thereon prompted the thought that with these earmarks lacking the quaint and faraway character, so cherished in their works, would be sacrificed. When the prophet said of Ephraim, "He is joined to his idols,

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

let him alone," it was not altogether a decree that saving grace was forever denied, but that the idol, plus the belief that went with it, was not, after all, such a bad asset, and was certainly better than no idol and no belief.

### II

The method of painting should account largely not only for their manner of technique, but for the composition. The fact that the paper or silk dries rapidly forces one characteristic and fosters another. It necessitates rapid execution and naturally gives birth to this conventionalized treatment. It is the problem of Schiller's Bell; material must be added while the matter is molten. Everything must be waiting. The sure way is the old tried way and so the painters of one school are all echoes of the masters, and the master's art is a bundle of receipts working with rare certainty. The wonderful dexterity in loading the brushes with color and water so that by the right pressure a single graduated stroke might give such a result as we would produce with three or more, must be rated as conventionalized skill, the result of recurring experiences.

Again the really high-class notion of building his art around the spiritual essence of his subject braces the Japanese artist to impart the inner character of the subject as of first importance. The tiger, a theme so often portrayed, must be thought of as a ferocious beast. The *spirit of ferocity* therefore must be exhibited in

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

every stroke. The eye especially must express this. The result is plainly a ferocious beast, but not always a good tiger,<sup>1</sup> and he who had never seen a tiger and whose demand is for form rather than spirit must go to the menagerie for a real knowledge of what he looks like, or refer to a painting by an artist of the west.

Even when the realistic movement started at the end of the seventeenth century in Japan, and subjects changed from mythological, legendary, and spiritual themes to those of everyday genre, the trace or taint of the conventional was still apparent. In fact, if realism is to be secured, inadequate means (those restricted to the first and second dimensions merely) are insufficient. The later realism of Japan is still far away from modern reality.

The æsthetics of Chinese and Japanese art which may be traced to most ancient sources contain much of what constitutes our own code. Their universal law of Buddhism applying not only to painting but to poetry, its "elder sister" is the *ten-chi-jin*, or heaven, earth, and man; that everything represented must be presented in a proportional value as indicated by this ratio, the most important item being heaven, the next earth, and the last man.

Herein is expressed our two principles of principality and subordination in ratio.

The *sei-do*, or principle of living movement is one already referred to, demanding that the artist actually possess himself of the life of the

<sup>1</sup>On page 117, see *Tigers* by a modern artist of Japan, a marked improvement in character over anything discoverable in Japanese art.



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

thing depicted. The insistence that *kokoro*, or the essence and presiding genius of a thing or place be preserved, is of most vital concern.

The principle of suggestion, *esorogoto*, is one insisting that the work be not too real. Its value is gauged not so much by its literalism as by its *kokoro*, or inner spirit.

*Ki-in* is the result of that personal distinction that with us signifies style. There is no formula for this, but a picture must possess it or else fail before their critics.

*Keisho*, besides meaning shape, also signifies art prosperity. It is the principle of taste, and frowns upon all unclassical vagaries or personal peculiarities

The principle of *in yo* is, in a word, that of contrast. Like most of the principles of art its origin is Chinese, *in* meaning darkness, and *yo* light; beyond this it signifies negative and positive, passive and active, female and male, lower and upper, even and odd. The presence of this principle interrupts sameness and produces its opposite, variety. It is the base of their scheme of light and dark or *notan*. A demand for this division of tonic forces is really the same feeling which leads them further toward the variety in like objects introduced, those active and those passive, a difference descending to the minutest detail of trivial objects.

With the principles of proportion, *ichi*, the designer of the screen or scroll is most concerned. Here his forces must balance and prove unified in the allotted space. Though

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

no positive analysis of balance is known to them they show the necessary feeling for the principle of the steelyard — of the small isolated member weighing out with the larger mass. The small accent is most thoughtfully placed and when nothing appropriate occurs, the signature is made to serve. Whistler was deeply sensitive to this balance by the isolated spot and would test it here and there until it satisfied him in the *ensemble*. Note, for this quality, his portrait of Miss Alexander as well as for the balance of spaces revealed by its architectural line.

Although we of the west feel that perspective was a branch of art that never very deeply affected the Chinese or Japanese conscience, one of the most important precepts of Chu Kaishu, laid down in his great classic entitled "Poppy Garden Conversations," refers to the *en kin*, or the far and the near, insisting that all available devices be employed to secure this. That perspective of line did not become scientific until recently the great mass of their art attests. Aerial perspective, however, was never more delicately and satisfactorily exploited than in the wonderful landscapes of China and Japan. Indeed, herein they express the great quality of water over oil as a solvent for color, advantaged by the superior lightness inherent in watercolor.

This art is never produced from nature, but by observation and sketchbook notes. From early childhood the study of all living things becomes a part of education, the frequent walks with the teacher who talks about what they

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

encounter being as essential as the correct holding of the brush to produce the forty-eight symbols of their alphabet.

The Japanese artist with this training behind him has already an important start, and the seventy-two rules of art with which he is confronted become largely truisms founded on a knowledge of nature already obtained in childhood.

### III

The broad difference between the art of the east and that of the west is that the former is subjective and the latter objective, the former striving to express the idea through the object depicted, the latter intent on enforcing the character of the object depicted. The former art never shocks: though oft appealing to sensation, it is not sensational. It is often mysterious but seldom profound. It has largely to do with allegory, legend, and illustration. Its matter-of-fact realities always lie closely upon the basis of influential design. We detect the story in much of it, but we should never miss its important expression of decoration. The pictorial elements strive after an æsthetic remodeling of necessary material.

Save for the introduction of genre, little change in manner and none in technique are observable throughout this history of a people's art, beginning before Odoacer the Goth swept over Italy, showing highest development before Columbus discovered America, and continuing its uninterrupted stream from the fountain of

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

pure classicism quite down to the present. While our western art is scientific and intellectual, standing for form, the spirit of eastern art demands a sensuous and emotional expression of rhythm. The incarnation of the genius of rhythm, declares one of their critics of the sixth century, the inner spirit and not the outer semblance, is what the artist should aspire to.

Says Lawrence Binyon: "The limitations of eastern tradition keep its art pure and make even the productions of insignificant artists a pleasure to look upon. In our more burdened art, failure is more frequent, though to its greater triumphs attaches a greater glory."

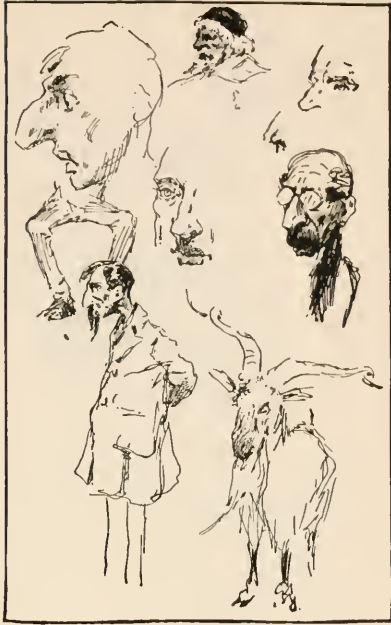
### IV

Line, so important and diligent a study to the Japanese artist, is a means of *expressing character*; the second of the six canons of the critic Shakaky of the fifth century deals with line, and is termed the law of Bones and Brush work. This name explains its purpose; the line is looked upon as the skeleton of the growth depicted, practically its inner spirit, the lines expressing the nerves and arteries. This principle has to do with nature likeness but not necessarily with organization.

"The sacredness of calligraphy is the worship of line pure and simple," says the author of the "Ideals of the East." "Each stroke of the brush contains in itself the principle of life. It must not be thought that the excellence of a great Chinese or Japanese painting lies in its accent-



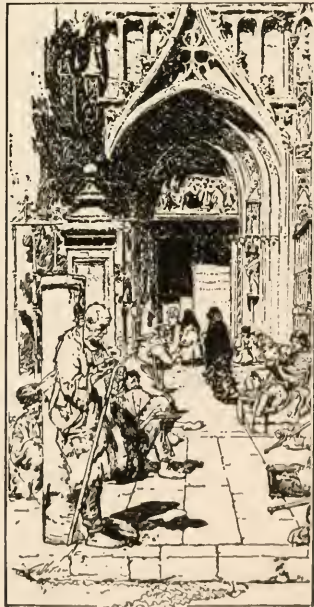
CHAS. KEENE



A. B. FROST

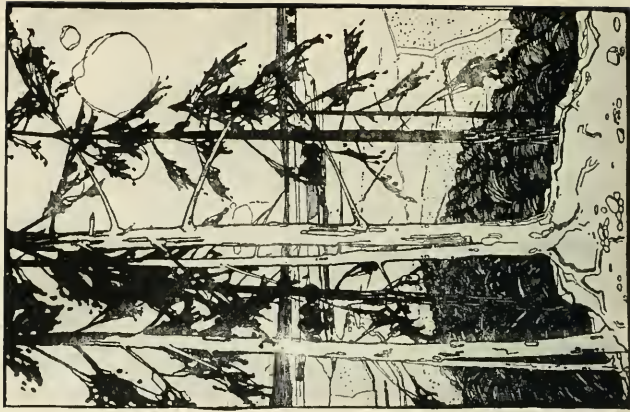


FORTUNY

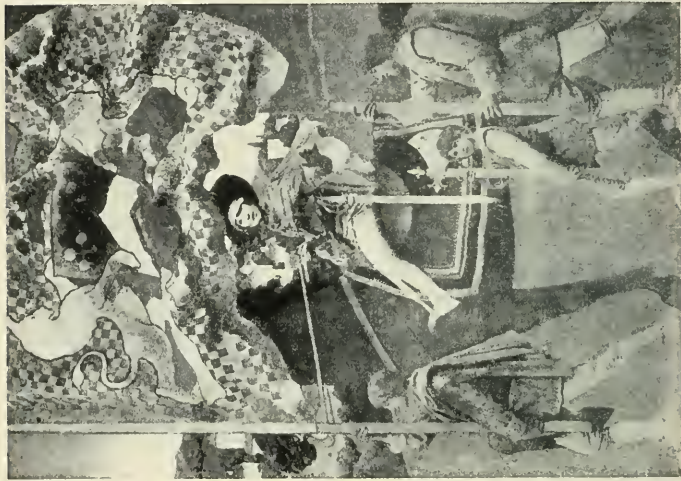


VIERGE

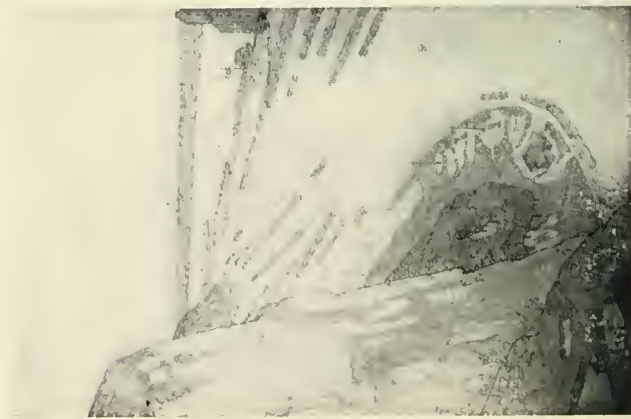
EXPRESSIVE LINE. OCCIDENTAL



PINES — J. C. Moody



DIES IRAE — Maxfield Parrish



THE TERMINAL — Warren

INFLUENCE OF DECORATION ON ILLUSTRATION

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

uation of outlines and contours; nevertheless, these do, as simple lines, possess an abstract beauty of their own."

This last phrase is very true, the great variety of line, offered the selection of the artist, opens a most interesting study to the amateur of Japanese art.

Besides this, line means organization. One may often fail, however, to get a strong impression of line that means such constructive unity, in Oriental art, unless the subject is some form of growth. Nor does it represent a *means* of technique, as with the etching of the west; but rather the thing itself. In fact, the Oriental designer cares much more about the "spirit" of the things presented than about their final organization, though the sense of composition is one in which their art has had its development during the latter periods. Their greatest designer of prints, Hokusai and Hiroshige I, had, undoubtedly, seen examples of the engraved art of Europe and this must have been in a measure a strong influence. To one of decided inclination toward construction, much of the early art of both China and Japan is necessarily regarded with but half-hearted enthusiasm, as over and over again one comes upon examples fairly groping for this structural quality and which, without sacrificing any of their sacred canons, might have been incorporated.

The sense of movement, sequence, and the dominating item, however, generally finds forcible adaptation among their best artists.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

Comparison for efficiency of line might well be made between the best draughtsmen of the west and those of the east, bearing in mind always that the art best able to *suggest* a truth is, in the scale of art, rated higher than that which labors to *imitate* the actual. With this conceded, and, also, that even in their realistic period conventional line is still almost entirely in use, we submit a drawing by Hokusai (page 113) or Kiosai or Toyokuni (page 129) and place it beside a pen drawing by <sup>1</sup>Abbey or Fortuny or Keene or Frost or Vierge (page 144). The drawings of the former group will call vividly to one's mind the figures and drapery, etc., *if he has seen them*. The lines will be found to be organic, displaying large synthetic knowledge of form. The work of the other group will enable you to know about the subject without former *acquaintance*. The treatment of drapery by Abbey will give you the folds of a skirt exactly as they fall and you may decide by the weight and character of the fold whether it is of silk, satin, linen, or fustian. One warms at once to the actuality, feeling the appropriateness of reality in a subject which is real.

But beyond this consideration, it is interesting to continue the comparison. Here are two great art systems competing in the range of *expressive line*, the first means employed by man in graphic attempt and a means which has remained the most potent in both decorative

<sup>1</sup>It is impossible to include an example by Mr. Abbey as his publisher is now guarding all of his productions with scrupulous care.



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

and expressive art. The recommendation of line above other methods is twofold; because of its simplicity it is the most direct emotional and personal mode open to the artist, the quick strokes of the telegraphic keyboard being scarcely more rapid than those of the pen draughtsman in pursuit of a hot thought.

Fitting this capacity to the demands of expression has secured results more varied through the simple modifications of a personal psychology than one may discover in either painting or sculpture.

In noting the limitations of the Japanese line, the way of its making must be borne in mind. The line is at best an adjustment of expression from fingers to shoulder. It must be rendered with a full arm swing, a fact that accounts largely for its ample and synthetic character. The Orientalist cannot pause for the ever varying niceties of drapery or the exact character-giving modulations of the face. His method clearly prescribes his limitations. His intimacy with fact, therefore, is such as is obtainable at arm's length.

Not so with those draughtsmen whose fingers have a support at the wrist. What infinite possibilities are at once added. Look upon the added nature quality, not to mention the greater force and range of technique. The purely dexterous ability of the Japanese, easily exemplified as greater than our own through his wonderful carvings of wood and ivory and his creations in lacquer, no less than by his performances with the brush in the detail of

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

flowers, fish, etc., might be readily turned toward a higher degree of linear expression were he to take up the pen and use it in our method.

With Abbey and Menzel, both of whom had the instinct of painters, the pen became as ready a tool for expressing a surface as the brush. In the case of each it may be said they *painted with the point* and with Fortuny no less do we realize that he confronts his subject as a painter with full respect for "values." With Keene, Frost, and Vierge, more thought is put into the line, as a line, which as a means is quite as interesting to them as the result.<sup>1</sup>

### V

A proper conception of modern art could not be had without acknowledgment of the Japanese blend. This art did not serve as an influence in bulk as, let us say, did Impressionism where the convert swallowed whole. The impassable gulf between eastern and western art, a gulf deepened by both the technique and by the limitations of the two-dimensional range of the former, was sufficient to preserve it from infringement, and administer sober

<sup>1</sup>Especially may this be said of Frost whose constantly active hand is never more agreeably employed than when shaping no matter what with his "303 Spencerian." The accompanying group of sketches is one of a score of pages in the possession of the author upon which this artist has let go his delight for line creation. They range from the most delicately conceived heads and hands to the wildest extravagances of caricature of animals and men. They all explain the infinite capacity of line for expression no less than testifying to the joy of creating with it as a means.



POSTER — *Julius Klinger*



HALLOWE'EN — *A. E. Rice*



CONFETTI — *Fancher*



AUTUMN — *W. H. Eve*

POSTER ART



FALLEN LEAVES — *Wm. Wendt*



CYPRESS, PINES — *Maurice Denis*

DECORATIVE LANDSCAPE

THE SUBJECT SEEN WITH REFERENCE TO ITS POSSIBILITIES OF LINE, SPOTS, AND SPACES

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

restraint on the western admirer who longed to appropriate. While western pride in our own aims and antecedents would in any case have been sufficient to hold in check a too obvious regard for this mode, it was inevitable that the sensation which fell from the clear sky of the Island Kingdom during the London Exposition of 1862 startled and delighted Europe with a new vision. Artists made love to it on sight, courted it over its high bamboo fence, and then settled down to consider how it would be possible to attach it piecemeal. Its warm reception opened an immediate market for everything Japanese, and the Paris Exposition following five years later was seized upon by the Japanese Government to drive the wedge. An analysis of the new picture art revealed these possibilities which were available alike for expression in three dimensions as in two; namely, the attractiveness of spacing, the attractiveness of spotting, its suggestiveness through repression, its tendency to parallelism, to repetition, and, in its best compositions, to inclusion. The exhilaration of the empty space and of the plane seen from above fitted the temperament and subject of Degas to a nicety. His ballet dancer proved most striking in such arrangement. Whistler found that his own subject as well as his sense for reserved and tonal color exactly fadged with the clever bridge and village subjects of the school of the "outer world," and that the ancient screens and prints contained the subdued harmony of color which was his by nature. With Whistler it never was so

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

much a case of kidnapping as adoption, adoption of something hailed as germane to his personal predilections.

True, Whistler boldly took the Japanese subject in his "Lady of the Land of Porcelain" and a few other canvases, and in his balcony arrangements either with or without the Japanese subject, but his accommodation of the flat, low-toned Japanese print to his own portraits and landscapes was in a more natural course. He had always seen the Thames and London under the simplified reserve produced by the flat washes of Japanese painting, and he, at any time, would rather have the shadow's mystery for his subject's repose than a noon-tide revelation of its character.

It is reasonable to suppose also that Manet admired this art of two dimensions to his own good as a personal influence, as likewise the truly impressionistic savor of this art. Monet evidently seized upon it to strengthen his natural disregard for obvious composition. The poster painters of Paris and Munich found in its flatness and simplicity exactly what they needed; the mural painters learned from it the effectiveness of large spaces and perhaps learned something from its psychology of line. Our own Winslow Homer doubtlessly simplified his arrangements to a few large areas, a trait noticeable in his marine paintings and many of his watercolors. His most Japanesque canvas, the "Fox and the Crows," under a dull gray sky of winter, with the snow lying deep along a rocky coast, is one of his happiest concepts.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

With the painters, adaptation was necessarily limited. With the bookmen, in cover design, and with the illustrators it was appropriated *en bloc*. Vierge, Steinlen, Louis Rhead, Parrish, Penfield and a host of others knew the value of simplification and exercised it. Before the Japanese print habit had become fixed, illustration had been of a distinctly different order.

The fascination of the Japanese subject in its distinct Japanese technique to some has been so great that a coterie of excellent artists has given itself to the production of "Japanese prints." Among the more successful of these may be mentioned F. M. Fletcher, J. D. Batten, and Edgar Wilson of England. Riviere, Lepere of France, Emil Orlik of Austria, Fraulein Hein of Germany, and Miss Helen Hyde of America.

## CHAPTER XI

### CONCEPTION OF PAINTING

“You can never show truly more than you are capable of experiencing.— *Delsarte*.”

WHEN Gauguin asserted that “artists were either plagiarists or revolutionists,” his rapier slashed in two directions. It penetrated to the heart of Tradition, scoring, however, what can be called only a “fair touch” without the sting of blood letting; and it likewise became a vigorous prick in the side of the young artist with his career before him.

The artist must either shake himself free of what has gone before or submit to the taunt of being but a “derivative.” That the artist is a plagiarist, as to his technique at least, had better be acknowledged and that cheerfully; but so is the scientist and the musician and the man of letters. They all stand on Tradition. It is their platform, but from this they reach out, adding a truth or substituting one in the long chain of ultimate truth. Revolutions are never necessary save as it is proven that the trail is hopelessly lost or leads nowhere.

But has this ever been so in art? Has not rather the torch been handed from one generation to another over the heads of the wavering and halting ones, and Tradition stood as the



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

saving bulwark to which art has appealed for reinstatement after its discursions into the mazes of experiment or degeneration?

In the time of art's darkness — the night between the setting of its sun with the end of the Greco-Roman period and its rising after a lapse of thirteen centuries, that period when the art instinct was kept alive by the more tangible experience of architecture, graphic expression withered, and men only yearned without strength for articulation. The art feeling had died because of the simple lack of intellectual ability to make their expression cogent. They had the material, and even a desire, of an impotent sort, but they lacked a sense of co-ordinate values between these, and the product was therefore a haphazard thing in which the elements were frequently out of scale, and neither adequate intrinsically nor balanced and fitting by association. They therefore appealed to another feeling, not the æsthetic, which is unhappily confounded with it; namely, the sympathetic, which is naught else but appreciation of an *intention*. Thus it happens that what is merely aimed in the direction of art, and has no claim upon recognition by any essential attribute or quality, is often admitted to its association from a historic point of interest. And so we find in many museums, works lacking every requisite save emotion, set up to be viewed and rated as true art to the confusion of those people for whose art education the museum chiefly exists, remaining as a perpetual enigma to their confused intelligence.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

Art begins where their authors have left off; it begins by producing unity in place of unrelated, misfitted parts which in such works repel pleasure. They therefore have little place in the gallery of art but rather in the museum dealing with art's history. Among these works at times is found toneful and attractive color, very frequently the gift of the centuries. By these conditions they qualify under the category of *some art*, and the æsthetic pleasure from this source may at times justify their presence among works of greater unity, but I submit that the will to do should no more be taken in lieu of accomplishment in the tenth century than in the fifteenth or twentieth A. D. or the third or second B. C.

The singular but accepted fact that pity finds kinship with love may be largely explained by a truly sporting instinct in man which credits an honest effort even in defeat. "Well tried for" often smothers failure with a garland, and in all departments of personal effort sympathy is ever ready with her minority report. But has criticism, which is supposed to hold the scales with blinded eyes, anything to do with these special pleadings?—only in so far as art is acknowledged to have its wellsprings for accomplishment in both love and emotion and in our natural willingness to honor this source.

It must not be supposed that the above applies to all primitive painting but to that only which is practically destitute of art quality, samples of which may be found in many museums, furnished them in the spirit of the anti-

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

quary having in mind the history of painting rather than the saner spirit which regulates and directs with the single purpose of æsthetic achievement and the natural educational result which such contact has upon the people.

This sympathy with the yearning for speech of dumb tongues, the longing for accomplishment of unskilled fingers, the effort of song by the tuneless voice is the starting point of oratory, painting, sculpture, and music, and the same point also for the beginning of an education which an expression in any of these demands.

“*Ex nihilo nihil fit*” will continue to be one of those pillars of creation which no new philosophy will ever disturb, and when we may pause to admire evidences of true art in the modern primitiveness of Post Impressionism we may feel assured that it is something besides sympathy which has moved us toward it.

## II

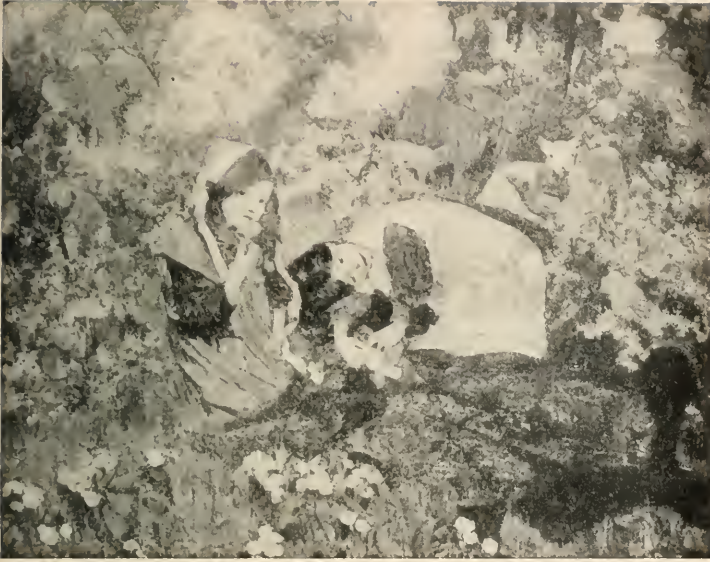
Certain ideals and standards applying both to the subject and to the technique of art there have always been which have tacitly governed the great producers; standards so good and true as to prove their worth without argument by what they have created. These are dialects of art's language — slightly differing modes of using the same figures of speech. They were invented and introduced by different original men and solely, let it be assumed, in the hope of improving the means of their expression.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

In fact, technique the means, has long been the absorbing thought in art. The emphasis of the schools is placed just here, scant attention being paid until recently to the real creation of the æsthetic thing. So engrossed indeed have we become with method that subject in art no longer counts.

The jury, representing, for the moment, one of the most important art institutions of the country, in its award of prizes, recently hovered in its decision between two works, the first a large canvas painted by one of our foremost artists abroad, a man recognized by many of the European governments. It was a notable composition of twelve life-sized figures, its many difficulties ably managed and displaying a noble theme with adequate technique and superior color. The other was a study of a draped model. To make more sure in their decision the smaller picture was taken down and placed beside the other. It was found in such a comparison that the "study" was technically better than any single figure of the composition and the decision therefore was for that. Such a judgment as a proclamation for technique as the important quality, becomes a humiliation of art herself and the numerous and necessary attributes which that word implies, a discouragement to great achievement in its substitution of the means for the end. But producers are naturally interested in the *way*.

The Van Eyck brothers, as the fathers of painting, proceeded with oil colors as one would with water color, relying on a brilliant white



A SPRING IDYLL — *E. A. Hornell*



VENETIAN SERENADERS — *Frank Brangwyn*

FIGURE PAINTING INFLUENCED BY DECORATION



DECORATIVE USE OF THE  
HUMAN FORM



ANGEL OF PURITY — *St. Gaudens*



THE DANCE — *Bela Pratt*

DECORATIVE SCULPTURE

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

ground to make effective their pure and transparent color applied as a glaze. This is practically Titian's method, and with slight modification, that of the whole Venetian School.

Rubens, founding his method on the technique of the lower Italian schools, sought to produce his effect with the most direct means, painting with *impasto* over a warm undertone of glazed color.

Rembrandt, ever searching for the ultimate qualities of nature, resolved that depth was one of them, and the Rembrandt surface, intimating blood, fibre, and bone beneath, "the far in quality" which George Eliot demands in literature, he obtained by both of these methods combined with scumbling and scraping. As to technique there was nothing other than these until the advent of the Impressionists. What they did was to apply the magnifying glass to color and separate the combination of any composite color into its simples, making the small grain of pigment a large one, so that the mixture became more vivacious and therefore to the technique more important.

This allows to the artist but four methods of pigmental usage, and it is not likely that painting will soon find another.

The subdivisions of the Impressionistic formula; that of *pointillisme*, the use of points or dots of color, as exploited by Pissarro, or the long linear *tache* of color, or that of Van Gogh, which may be described as ribbons of pigment, or the style Gauguin formed for himself when he sought an entirely new method of expression,

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

an attempt which finally drove him from the environment of his native art to the freedom and lavishness of Nature in the tropics; these are subdivisions of the technique of Monet. Attempts have been made by Signac, Seurat and their following to further disintegrate color in the effort to establish individual modes for the new idea.

In this scientific analysis of color, Impressionism, there is more opportunity for personal technique than in the methods which preceded it, founded as they were on close imitation. And so we have, together with the non-conformist spirit, which came in with Manet when he startled Paris with his introduction of nude figures with draped, at a picnic party,<sup>1</sup> this new ideal both of subject and technique, stimulating original license of every description. The positive worth of the color end of the new thing was so unquestionable that it has covered a number of petty sins which have sought shelter beneath it. There is no logical reason why Impressionism should have taken on and fostered a dislike for the constructive *form* of design in art, why the nature-taken-as-she-is idea has anything germane to the use of pure color, or the real principles of the new creed.

The popular notion concerning Impressionism is as chaotic to the average mind as is Idealism or the aims of Matisse. The reason lies largely in our swift demand that every new thing be christened and registered. That

<sup>1</sup> Though this picture met refusal at the Salon it was subsequently bought for the State and is now in the Louvre.



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

accomplished by way of introduction, we then draw up and become acquainted. In many cases it turns out that the naming was premature, and when grown up, the character of the child stands often ready to prove the error. It was so with Impressionism.

When a casual entry in the Salon catalogue announced that the work by Monet was an "impression of nature," the author doubtless believed he had thrown a torpedo over the high fence of the Academy. Indeed, it did go off with a bang, but they in power treated the little noise with scorn. This scorn was, of course, both earth and water for the new seed which straightway shot up like Jack's beanstalk and was believed to be a *new thing*. In fact, however, as so often happens with the new idea in art, it proved to be a very old one.

### III

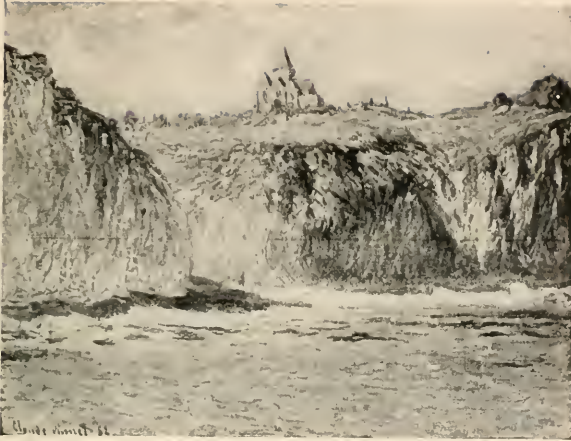
Impressionism had been the soul of Chinese and Japanese art for centuries and is the means of expression to their mysticism and idealism. Their best art has always fought shy of realism, for to the Oriental mind the mirror held up to nature eliminated the very essence of what they felt art to be. In less emphatic degree the same feeling is evinced in the art of Ancient Egypt. The impression of the thing in place of its actuality is as a generality the soundest sort of art doctrine and of much more difficult attainment than absolute imitation which renders man a technical

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

counterfeiter of natural fact. What degree of originality of *impression* may be substituted for natural fact or what part of any natural fact may be treated as an impression is a question as varied as the taste of man may make it, and so to a degree almost every artist is part realist and part impressionist. "How inept it is," says de Maupassant, "to believe in reality, since each of us carries his own in his mind. Our eyes, ears, nose, tastes create as many different varieties of taste as there are men in the world. Each creates an illusion of the world for himself, poetical, sentimental, gay, melancholy, ugly or sad according to his nature," and furthermore he creates it in every degree of impressionism or realism. Gérôme, who is, of course, rated a realist, was impressionistic in the suggestion of handling of the loft over his "Sword-dancer." The sweeping together of detail into a maze of indefinability as a background for his sitter unites true impressionism with the realism of the portrait painter, no less than does, in the case of Oriental art, the carefully wrought tree or flower or figure with its background of mysticism in suggestion of mountain, mist or torrent, which under the conditions could have no basis in reality and which stand as an impression of these things.

The impression of the real in place of the real is the true impressionism and such art may be as well expressed in black and white as in color.

But at the moment when this notion was revived in France, the disintegration of color as a scientific experiment available to painting



COAST VIEW — *Monet*  
Courtesy of Durand-Ruel



YOUNG GIRL READING — *Childe Hassam*  
Courtesy of N. E. Montross

IMPRESSIONISM



STAG HUNT, DECORATED SCREEN — *R. L. Chanler*



A WOMAN — *Henri Matisse*

POST IMPRESSIONISM  
PRIMITIVISM AND ELEMENTALISM

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

was being exploited and to the Impressionistic notion it very happily applied. The use of pure broken color depriving the surface of its actual reality was a substitution for the accepted imitation which had been the striving of academic art. It therefore became *impressionistic technique*, and Monet, heralded as the prophet of the "new idea," was able to put a scientific foundation under it. Manet, who with some justice was regarded as its founder, was in no wise reconciled to the spectacle of his own ism being switched up this new and untried track. The two became claimants for the discovery of an idea which was in reality two ideas, and should be so rated. Meanwhile, Whistler let it be known that long before Manet became impressionistic *he had been*; and as to Monet, it was found that he had been studying hard over Turner's works just before launching his final practice. What better foundation could the new art have, either for its suggestive form or its juxtaposed color, than the "Slave Ship" or "Rain, Steam, and Speed — the Great Western Railway" of the English painter? But as was the case with Columbus and Vespucci, it was Monet who brought the new thing into a final, categorized system fit to represent a school, which quickly formed, and will in history be the recognized head and front of Impressionism, the fourth great manner of painting.

Disciples flocked to the standard. Plunging beneath the tide, they came up with the rainbow tints snapping in their eyes and cleansed of every vestige of bitumen and Van Dyke

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

brown. A healthy reaction followed. The simon-pure dealt in these new tints and painted blue tree trunks, purple cows, and yellow hillsides. Others clarified their palettes and bought no more brown or umber. All along the line there was change of some sort. A generation has now passed, time sufficient over which to render an estimate of art's new departure.

In a word, then, Monet's impressionism has wrought a mighty regeneration in painting, giving to paint a keener edge and endowing it with a potency for imitating nature's quality such as it never possessed aforetime.

Monet's impressionism in its suggestiveness of rendering natural fact has brought back a neglected quality in art and has proved the "cross counter" to the direct lunge of classic art in its effort to touch the whole truth. In sculpture this phase of Impressionism, as the only one open to it, has naturally resulted in a truly interesting development and with the opportunity thus afforded for uniting an awakened imagination with the chisel's cold fact an interest by suggestion, so long the exclusive privilege of painting, has been secured.

## IV

During its first generation it is of interest to note the changes which of necessity have taken place. "The innocence of eye" which the creed demanded resulted in an implicit reliance upon the facts of nature event to the subtleties of

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

change which may be marked in the quality of color between 9:20 and 11 A. M. Whereas a romanticist would put through an inspiration from nature at white heat weaving his web out of himself and with his back probably turned upon the source of his inspiration, the new creed demanded an absolute dependence upon nature. Thus it is that extraordinary and quickly changing aspects of nature are rejected by this brotherhood. Their eyes have been trained with such singleness of purpose as to serve as a lens which must confront its subject before it may act. There is enough interest in nature's varying modes between dawn and sunset however to supply subjects of universal interest to the impressionistic painter.

In America, perhaps unconsciously influenced by the conservatism of the American public, its adherents have cautiously weeded out its non-essentials. Were a collection of impressions made by the "Ten American Painters" twenty years ago put on view to-day those changes would be marked. How by this time have we been allowed to forget its manifestos in maroon and gold, and the purple cow, once passed beyond the horizon, has never been recalled. While preserving every good thing in the creed they have since mixed it with American sagacity and American personality, so that now the manner is quite forgot, and each in his own way has worked out for himself his own formula. While at that time they were merely exploiting the new way of representing a surface, they are now more interested in making that surface

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

look like nature, an acknowledgment to the relative importance that ends have always finally secured as compared with means. With the slogan of "making it look like" there are some in this small number who have about completed an actual circuit, returning by way of Impressionism to the mirrored nature of the seventeenth century Flemings. Others of them face nature merely in the sense of artists striving to reproduce her, rather than as votaries of an ism which they feel bound to uphold. The latitude which Monet himself allows his own technique gives the notion that the latter-day Impressionism is applicable rather to the expression of a mood than the hard and fast insistence of formula.



## CHAPTER XII

### LATER TENDENCIES — POST IMPRESSIONISM — MATISSE AND PICASSO

“Evolution is not only a movement forward; in many cases we observe a marking time and still more often a deviation or turning back.” — *Henri Bergson*.

THE later movement in art is coincident with the new philosophy, a philosophy of primitive-ology and intuitive creation. Though the philosophy of Bergson<sup>1</sup> is an elaborate advocacy for intuitiveness and stimulates a confidence in and an approval of its use, it by no means discounts the logical process which it distinctly asserts the intuitions epitomize. The intuitions are right only through a right organization by which they are produced and therefore a product from them can only be good in such degree as the source is good. Like will produce like in every philosophy, and this universal law is proved by the empty echoes with which the halls of “Art” are now resounding.

“We must,” he declares, “break with scientific habits which are adapted to the fundamental requirements of thought. We must do violence to the mind, go counter to the natural bent of the intellect, but that is just the function of philosophy.

(<sup>1</sup>Henri Bergson's “Creative Evolution.”)

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

“Evolution does not mark out a specific route; it takes directions rather than aiming at ends and remains inventive even in its adaptations.”

It is this latest trend in thought which more than anything else has produced the point of view for the school of Matisse and Picasso; for literature now is forcing art's helm as it always has, from the time of Plato, who preceded Phidias, and of Dante, who preceded Angelo, and J. J. Rousseau, who preceded Manet, and Guy de Maupassant, who helped to close the epoch of genre.

The revolution of the Post Impressionists originates as a protest to the idea that imitation is the business of art; that technique is the goal where the effort of the artist must finally stop, that the result must be beautiful, that art's pleasure is *sensuous* rather than *intellectual*.

The movement is logical. After Bouguereau the deluge! To surpass the perfection of the school of Cabanel, Lefebvre, Meissonier, and Alma Tadema was technically impossible.

The fact is there was a great deal of Bouguereau in art's last generation, and when the days of a sweetened and perfected beauty were waning and the naturalism of Bastien Lepage and the imperious gesture of Impressionism led us out of doors, there was too much young lady with the parasol. She has been too willing. She has sat beneath her parasol for a full quarter century, allowing the light to fall on her at all angles and every degree of intensity in order that the painter might study *mere aspect*. Dur-

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

ing this last period painters have learned and expressed more about sunlight than the world has ever known before; but it is almost time to let the young lady off.

Art has capacities that these technical enthusiasts are neglecting. Their neglect has been rudely pointed out by the seers and prophets of our modern day. They deride the notion that any man should enslave his perceptions and craftsmanship with the imitation of surfaces; and instead they place man's rational pleasure in art on a higher level. They perceive the striving of the student, intent on making his copy "look like," and with a stroke across his back straighten him to face the inquiry; don't you know the difference between the real and the *sensation* of the real? You are circumscribing your subject by what you know about it. Give the imagination scope without frontier, where it may range unrestricted in vaster areas. Whereas you have been tying weights to your ideas, free them; whereas you have been looking straight at nature, look below and beneath her, look above and around her. There are things you will find in these ranges that will surprise you!

This movement is directing attention to universal ideas in a broadened and lengthened perspective, tapping the sources of subconscious emotion, and denying such value for the *obvious* as was placed upon it by a former time. In this scheme of art the æsthetic sense, defrauded of sustenance in the object, is asked to find it in the stimulation of the imagination, em-

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

phasized through the rhythmic and decorative enlivenment of the design. The art of Matisse and his school is a smart challenge to the existing order. Its tilt is not altogether at the beauty with which art has been busy, but with the academic notion that truth of "aspect" is of such vital importance.

In all fairness should we not be willing to pause and inquire whether, after all, the shock received from these expressions of ideas suddenly stripped of the conventional clothing, which a fashion of long tenure has prescribed, is not in part due to our equally conventional expectancy to find the fashion unchanged?

The frankness of the creed is enough to give it shelter, and with any open mind it should not be cast out because it looks like a serpent, but rather granted hearth room, with an opportunity to watch it. It may prove fangless and it may prove wise.

With Cézanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh there can be no doubt of sincerity. Cézanne was a recluse who wanted to be let alone, content to probe into the essence of natural aspect and render its elemental qualities. The directness of his painting would appeal to any one, in whatever station of life or ignorance of art, *as a great simple honesty*. It was not subtle, it was not finished, it was merely the reflex of a genuine mind.

Nor can we give a less sympathetic hearing to the cry of Van Gogh, that anything toward which he was drawn provoked a "holy ecstasy" in him, nor deny belief in his assertion that the

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

more ill (crazy) he was the better he painted. The mere feverish, cataclysmic technique of his work bears evidence sufficient of genuineness.

Gauguin, the man, was *sui generis*, a perfectly simple and natural anarchist who brushed aside convention in his search for fundamental things. So important to his art did he esteem the unfettered mind that he declared himself in revolt against all influences: "Everything I have learned from others has been a hindrance to me."

From these to Matisse is a long step.

Matisse announces that, "Expression lies not in the passion which breaks upon the face, or which shows itself in violent movement, but in the whole disposition of the picture.

"I condense the significance of the body by looking for the essential lines.

"That for which I dream is an art of equilibrium, of purity, of tranquillity, with no subject to disquiet or preoccupation; such as will be for every brain worker a sedative, something analogous to an armchair."

On the basis of these pronouncements he has won friends among the critics. Selecting from a number I present the opinions of four advocates of the new movement:

"We all agree that any form in which an artist can express himself is legitimate, and the more sensitive perceive that there are things worth expressing that could never have been expressed in traditional forms. We have ceased to ask, 'What does this picture represent?' and ask

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

instead, 'What does it make us feel?' We expect a work of plastic art to have more in common with a piece of music than with a colored photograph.

"That such a revolutionary movement was needed is proved, I think, by the fact that every one of them has something to say which could not have been said in any other form. New wine abounded and the old bottles were found wanting. These artists are of the movement because, in choice of subject, they recognize no authority but the truth that is in them; in choice of form, none but the need of expressing it. That is Post Impressionism.

"How, then, does the Post Impressionist regard an object? He regards it as an end in itself, as a significant form related on terms of equality with other significant forms. Thus have all great artists regarded objects. Forms and the relation of forms have been, for them, not means of suggesting emotion but objects of emotion. It is this emotion they have expressed. They are intended neither to please, to flatter, nor to shock, but to express great emotions and to provoke them."

CLIVE BELL.

"With these, ostentation of skill is likely to be even more fatal than downright incapacity.

"Now, these artists do not seek to give what can, after all, be but a pale reflex of actual appearance, but to arouse the conviction of a new and definite reality. They do not seek to imitate form, but to create form; not to imitate

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

life, but to find an equivalent for life. By that I mean that they wish to make images which by the clearness of their logical structure, and by their closely knit unity of texture, shall appeal to our disinterested and contemplative imagination with something of the same vividness as the things of actual life appeal to our practical activities. In fact, they aim not at illusion but at reality.

“The logical extreme of such a method would undoubtedly be the attempt to give up all resemblance to natural form, and to create a purely abstract language of form — a visual music; and the later works of Picasso show this clearly enough. They may or may not be successful in their attempt. It is too early to be dogmatic on the point, which can only be decided when our sensibilities to such abstract form have been more practised than they are at present. But I would suggest that there is nothing ridiculous in the attempt to do this. Such a picture as Picasso’s “Head of a Man” would undoubtedly be ridiculous if, having set out to make a direct imitation of the actual model, he had been incapable of getting a better likeness.”

ROGER FRY.

“For twenty years past, or more, painters have been following the lead set by writers, not only in the novels and dramas of life, but also in philosophy, and have been trying to get back to something fundamental.

“On the one hand, they have tried to express what we feel of life instinctively; and, on the

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

other, to express that feeling intellectually, in as abstract a manner as possible. In a word, pure feeling is what they aim to express; that is to say, feeling, unalloyed by association of ideas; the sort of feeling, in fact, that one may experience while listening to music; the sort of feeling that I have enjoyed, as many of my readers have, in the glorious experience of a walk among the mountains. The incidents, the personalities that make up the accidents of life have been left behind; the narrowness of time and space that hedges one around in the valley or the plain have been forgotten. . . .

“This being so, what can the artist do to create an illusion of the fact? How far can he substitute for actual experience in its purest form the suggestion and stimulation of its imagined equivalent? This, as I understand it, has been for some time and continues to be the reason and explanation of the modern movement.

“The movement is necessarily the antithesis of representation, considered as an end in itself, whether the representation be naturalistic, such as our eyesight immediately recognizes the truth of, or academic, namely, such as we would have the facts appear if we could make them over to conform to certain associated ideas we have acquired of what is perfect.”

CHARLES H. CAFFIN.

Says C. Lewis Hind: “The solid aspect of things has been painted superbly. Our sensation of them, which is really a much commoner experience to all of us, is rarely touched. That



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

is why pictures are not popular. They deal only with a fourth of life. When a man like Matisse audaciously flashes something of the unexplored three fourths on canvas it startles and angers us.

“Van Gogh broke a path into that three fourths of life which I repeat has never been explored in painting.

“We are now offered the beginning of an art that gives to a thing the part that endures. The work of these painters appeals to the imagination.”

In the two opinions, selected from scores in opposition to the movement, it will be noticed that no answer is made to the argument of the new cult. These writers assume that the burden of proof lies with the innovators. The last is the refutation of a scientist.

“To go to an exhibition with a solicitude ‘about meaning and about life’ at the expense of matters of technique is not simply to beg the question; it is to give it away with both hands. In art, elements of ‘meaning’ and ‘life’ do not exist until the artist has mastered those technical processes by which he may or may not have the genius to call them into being. This is not an opinion. It is a statement of fact. To exclude technique from art is no more possible than it is to dispense in architecture with ponderable substances. If we lay stress upon the point it is because we have here the one chief source of danger. What the student of these strange ‘isms’ needs to be warned against is

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

the specious argument that he cannot test them by any principles of criticism hitherto known to him, but must look at a picture as though it were something else, and admire it for qualities which he cannot see in it but must take on faith. There are numbers of nominally intelligent persons who seem really to believe that such an hypothesis is defensible. . . .

“In the process Matisse would appear to have relinquished all respect for technique, all feeling for his medium, to have been content to daub his canvas with linear and tonal coarseness. The bulbous, contorted bodies in his figure-pieces are in no wise expressive of any new and rationalized canon of form. They are false to nature, they are ugly as the halting efforts of the veriest amateur are ugly, and, in short, their negation of all that true art implies is significant of just the smug complacency to which we have alluded. Whether through laziness or through ignorance Matisse has come to the point where he feels that in painting an interior like his ‘Panneau Rouge’ or nudes like ‘Les Capucines’ or ‘Le Luxe,’ he is exercising the function of an artist, and, of course, there are crowds of half-baked individuals who are ready to tell him that he is right. As a matter of fact these things are not works of art; they are feeble impertinences.” ROYAL CORTISSOZ.

Says Mr. Kenyon Cox, speaking upon the “Illusions of Progress”:

“The race grows madder and madder. It is hardly two years since we first heard of Cubism,

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

and already the Futurists are calling the Cubists reactionary. Even the gasping critics, pounding manfully in the rear, have thrown away all impedimenta of traditional standards in the desperate effort to keep up with what seems less a march than a stampede. Let us then clear our minds of the illusion that there is such a thing as progress in the fine arts. We may with a clear conscience judge each new work for what it appears in itself to be, asking of it that it be noble and beautiful and reasonable, not that it be novel and progressive. If it be a great art it will be novel enough, for there will be a great mind behind it, and no two great minds are alike. And if it be novel without being great, how shall we be the better off? Even should the detestable things produced now prove to be not the mere freaks of a diseased intellect they seem, but a necessary outgrowth of the conditions of the age and a true prophecy of the 'art of the future,' they are not necessarily the better for that. It is only that the future will be unlucky in its art."

"These amorphous conceits, we read, aim to 'pictorially represent' the 'cellular and nervous reactions which carry the messages of sense perception to the brain.' Right here let us see whether we are in the realm of sense or nonsense. 'Pictorial' means nothing else than presentation over again — hence representation — of visual experiences. It can mean no other experiences than visual ones, because vision is the only sense by which we can become

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

cognizant of a design on canvas. Non-visual experiences are therefore impossible of representation, so that to talk of reproducing 'shivers,' 'emotions,' and 'thrills' is nonsense, and the same is true of the claim to represent 'the cellular and nervous reactions which carry messages to the brain.' Do not laugh — merely recall that obviously all expression is of some element of consciousness, and that 'cellular reactions carrying messages' are no more elements of consciousness than is the growth of one's toe-nails — nor a bit more important to one's neighbors.

"And it is further nonsense to talk of 'carrying messages of sense perception to the brain,' because 'perception' takes place only in the brain itself, and hence there is no such thing as a 'message of sense perception.' This whole farrago of jargon of scientific language empty of scientific knowledge is nonsense. These 'sensations' we hear about 'reproducing' are impossible of reproduction — even in the mind, still more on canvas — for when they are gone they are gone forever. What takes their place is not a sensation at all, but a memory, and a memory is not a sensation."—*N. Y. Tribune.*

The presumption of soundness of premise and argument on the part of the Post Impressionists may be had in the announcement of Clive Bell when in his article upon the second exhibition at the Grafton Galleries, London, he declares, "The victory is already won."

In the face of this, and of such a statement



POTATO GATHERERS — *Van Gogh*



IDYLL — *Gauguin*

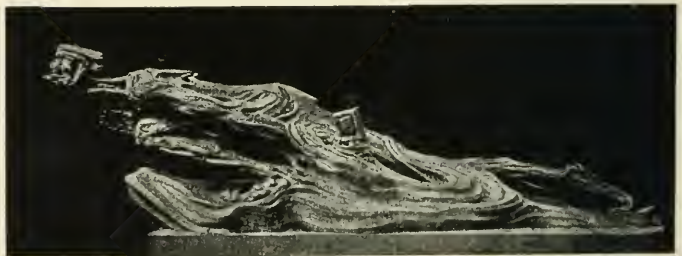
POST IMPRESSIONISM CONCERNED WITH RHYTHMIC LINE,  
DESIGN AND PRIMITIVE EXPRESSION



EUPHEMIA — *Jacob Epstein*



ELEMENTAL LINE — *Jo. Davidson*



THE SHADE — *Hansen-Jacobsen*

POST IMPRESSIONISTIC SCULPTURE

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

from another as that "the best thing for real art would be to burn all existing galleries of art," it would seem worth while to hold up to the minutest inspection the claims of this new philosophy of art.

### II

The first thing that may be noticed in the pronouncements of several of the advocates quoted, is that they have not come together on any fixed creed and that their platforms disagree in essential particulars.

While Clive Bell declares that the "new" artist regards his object as "an end in itself," Mr. Fry makes it clear that it is not the thing itself which shall engage us but what *is suggested thereby* to "our contemplative vision," and Mr. Hind reminds us that these painters are breaking a path toward the unexplored, their work appealing to the imagination.

Mr. Caffin most ably states the case when he inquires, "How far can the artist substitute for actual experience the suggestion of its imagined equivalent? The movement is necessarily the antithesis of representation considered as an end in itself."

"We expect," says Mr. Bell, "a work of plastic art to have more in common with a piece of music than a colored photograph."

The principles governing plastic art and music are of course identical; the two arts are therefore germane. The colored photograph is only one of these arts in emphasis through an artless process; but the strict difference

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

between these arts is that we hear one and see the other, and in consequence the technical processes are as wide as creating a perfume for smelling or a sweetmeat for tasting.

Says Mr. Davidson: "The extremists are always comparing their work with music. But the parallel is not true. Take the compositions of Debussy, for example; no matter how far they depart from their predecessors they are never incomprehensible, because their author keeps within the limitations of the science of music."

Herein is quite the crux of the whole matter; these people are attempting to touch one sense through the processes belonging distinctively to another. To ask us to hear the music of a statue or picture is no less absurd than to ask how the perfume of the lily tastes or what its odor looks like; or what a nocturne in F smells like. For one, architecture has seemed like "frozen music," to Corot his painting appealed as "my little music," but the charm of these golden metaphors may be spoiled by forcing the fact, and, having killed the poetry, we are left with only the dead goose.

"Every one of them," says Mr. Hind, "has something to say that could not be said in another form;" and here again we are obliged to challenge.

In reality everything for which expression is evoked by these means could be better said through the *form* of literature.

Post Impressionism is an attempt to make plastic art accomplish what by its nature it is



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

less fitted to perform than poetry or music. Directly upon using a line as a symbol, a color or a form as symbols, the mind engages itself with *these*, it sees them in their dimensions and color; it sees them likewise as associated with other lines, dimensions, and colors in the same work; it begins its activity of comparison, it takes their measures, it apprehends their quantities, their qualities; the mind receives, inspects, and perchance enjoys them. All this, literature relieves one of. The *word* has no such quantitative encumbrance. It does not pass through long corridors handing out its passport to several sentries. It arrives at once, the "winged word" of the Greek poet; and Pegasus is its true symbol. The *words* arm, hand, leg, call up only a general notion of these objects, but when these are spoken by graphic art they become particular. The fundamentality of idea which they aim at, alas! becomes concrete, and their generalization, particularized.

Lessing's Essay on the Laocoon is still a vital document which Post Impressionism may do well to study. Their line thins and melts away at this point.

When the greatest of Greek poets was content to describe his heroine, Helen of Troy, by the simple declaration that when she appeared *old men* experienced the emotions of youth, he created a far more lovely woman than had he particularized, and a lovelier woman than any sculptor or painter could express, strive howsoever hard he may; but what, were Matisse to essay the task!

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

What point in the scale of approach to the Homeric attainment would he be likely to touch or can it be reasonably expected that this system, with its handicap both of omissions and commissions, can ever be expressive of physical beauty? And further, is it possible that the national mind of any people, even that of the progressive French nation, would be willing to accept such expression as this school offers for sculpture commemorative of its great ones? Can we imagine the statesman, the soldier, or philanthropist put into the eternal marble or bronze and erected on a public pedestal as a lasting inheritance for the Nation — executed in the manner of Post Impressionist formulas?

If art be “the manifestation of the eternal ideal,” the acceptance of the art here offered can take place only after the uprooting of all that is back of that ideal, a reconstruction of those processes of thought universally accepted for twenty-five centuries.

Again, both Mr. Bell and Mr. Fry agree that the object of this art is to express and provoke emotion, and that in this accomplishment “ostentation of skill is more fatal than downright incapacity.” Here again the advocate is assuming an unfair premise in his argument before the jury. The true artist is never ostentatious. With an emotion as his inspiration and goal, he resorts to no subterfuge, but, full panoplied, strives for the creation of a like emotion in “the other man,” which he assures, by every expedient, to be made what is wanted,

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

rather than a haphazard sensation from a vague expression provoking the emotion — forsooth of pity for incapacity.

Meanwhile Mr. Caffin's enthusiasm has put him off his guard, and in rapt exultation over the freedom of the new art he takes a fling at the solicitude which an Academician has for "values."

Too true, they also are marked for the guillotine. What a carnival of anarchy! Now watch the *moplots* dance on the corpse of that which has outlived its usefulness. But what are values, and why are they at last thought valueless!

If for the painter *tone* is the polar star, *value* is the rudder. By these two means the artist steers his craft. The steering is proved to be wrong when he is betrayed by a false value. In music it is the one voice out of pitch with the chorus, it is the illogical note which ruins the solo. In poetry it is the weak rhyme or the lame spot in the metre. In architecture it is the element out of scale. In oratory it is the climax in the wrong place, or even the right word in the wrong place. In painting it is any error of tone upon a surface, and howsoever small it may be, it announces itself at once, the dead fly in the ointment. It may not be of importance in itself; the damage is not measured by its size or degree, but by the *area which it influences*.

We cannot believe that Mr. Caffin is willing to assume Samson's responsibility of pushing away this pillar and demolishing the temple.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

It is cited as an example of the power of this new intoxicant, which, like the loco-weed, will set the best-mannered horse in the world upon a series of mad plunges in his effort to free himself of all restraint. To rail at "values" and the quality which they insure is to discountenance painting from the time when, lifted out of the hands of the children who sought to revive it in the twelfth century, it took its place as an art reborn under the control of maturer minds, and up to the present, a period spanned by Botticelli and Sargent. The new species of art introduced by Matisse makes no use of the super qualities through which *each one* of the arts has attained development. The "quality" which is the gauge differentiating art from "some art" and "less art" is with him traced, now and then, in the happy grasp of an essential expression or characteristic, or, and quite as rarely, in an agreeable harmony of color, or design. The assay of Post Impressionism as an art would seem therefore to be very light, its dross outweighing its gold in overwhelming measure.

But this is not the final word nor the end of the argument any more than the present phase of Post Impressionism is its final expression. As every art grows out of its primitive condition, so may this. As an art it may be contemptible, as a philosophy it may be right. There is no need of harking back to childhood, of coddling the intuitions and slamming the door in the face of our intelligence to accomplish that for which this philosophy stands. It is a mistake to suppose that the end of "suggesting emotion" and

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

“finding an equivalent for life” is best attained by uncertainty of means. Simplicity of line may attain it, but not in the hands of the *ingénue*.

Ten years ago the writer made the prediction that the painting of the future would make much more out of the great capacity which *line* contains. The present tendency comes as a proof of that, but it starts too far back. When line becomes the contemplation of painters in its serious and scientific essence, a truly<sup>1</sup> new *art* may be evolved. In sculpture a striking example is had in bas-relief by Davidson. In the “Potato Gatherers,” herewith, by Van Gogh, there is also an expression of it.

### III

Simplification through the synthesis, of which this movement is the culmination may be seen all the way up and down the pathway of art. When instead of making all the twigs on a winter branch, as per the Dusseldorf school, these were swept together as one may see in Corot, it was a step in the direction of Matisse. Here was one stroke of the brush suggesting a number of separate facts. Such a statement contains the soul of the branch in exactly the degree that the soul of the face is manifested by the newer cult and as may be seen no less in the technique of Millet. When Whistler made smudges on his Battersea Bridge and called

<sup>1</sup>For an expansion of this see “Constructive Principles of Art,” by same author.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

them figures, to the disgust of Ruskin, or when Inness used the suggestion of a daub of paint for a cow or a countryman, to the confusion of the *bourgeois*, their procedure in art was exactly that of Matisse. The only artists who have kept away from the open door of suggestion are those whose natural love of detail promoted their creed for *absolute* truth: Ruysdael, David, Meissonier, Alma Tadema, etc.

But it is necessary to perceive two kinds of suggestion in graphic art; that which is partial and that which is complete; and again that which is highly synthetic, thoughtful, and even profound in its technique, and that which, in its failure at representation, frankly leaves the beholder to his own conclusions.

The *suggestion*, through thoughtfully selected parts, touches the highest reaches of art. Behold the pen drawings of Rembrandt, or his etchings in their first states, wherein a line may stand for several attributes of a thing; its length, contour, weight, etc. We take a vast delight in creating a sky out of the few eloquent lines from the needle of a great etcher, or wander with him afield over wide areas, occupying them at leisure where he has rapidly passed, staking his claims. This is that suggestion which the artist commands by his mastery of the whole subject and by his selection of specific means. No less may it be seen in the Corot branch or the face of the "Sower." In these, completeness is sedulously omitted with the same caution as with Stevenson when he approaches his *dénouement*.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

Not so with Matisse. With his art there is no space unfilled, there is no part undeveloped. Every part is accounted for and every part bespeaks design, (which really has nothing to do with the idea for which Post Impressionism stands). In place of the sensation of masterful capacity held in reserve through *unfinish*, rises the impression of apology for what has been inadequately performed. In place of an opportunity to complete the incomplete we are confronted with the job all done, and so badly, that we are provoked to do it all over again. And at this admission there are persons rising all over the hall of the "new" convention, exclaiming: "That is just what we want!" But the artist is a creator, the maker of a given thing which as a creation is complete. Instead, Matisse uses the means of outline and pigment for the creation *by the observer* of something at which he hints. We take no pleasure in the surfaces which he paints for they are without quality, nor in the semblance *per se* for these are monstrous. The pleasure to us is in finding something which lies beyond his guide post.

It is but a repetition of what the world has already lived through and rebelled against, a mistaken notion that the innocent cause of goodness is adorable. To the devout one kneeling before the image of the Virgin the newer thought has said: "Why magnify Mary — had you not better see Christ?" The collector of cocoons from which beauty has escaped may take a scientific pleasure in his collection

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

but they give him no æsthetic thrill. To him the lover of art says: "These have an interest, but only in their possibilities. If you seek a fuller rapture, come look at my butterflies." To which the other retorts: "If you can't see a butterfly by looking at a cocoon you have no imagination."

Matisse and his imitators are busying themselves with speculative philosophy, assisted by the first principles of drawing and painting, and they touch art only as graphic assistants of an idea, *and not as creators of art*. Their work is the scaffold of the building and pointing to it they bid us enjoy the edifice.

To him yearning for an æsthetic thrill it should only be necessary to call Nelly from her blocks and say, "Make me a picture that I may dwell upon it and see visions," or appeal to the postman or the car conductor. In anything these may do in their innocence of mind will be found the pure soul out of which æsthetic joy may be evolved.

The artist will then be he who hands out his synopsis of a play, complete from the rise to the fall of the curtain, with the exits and entrances marked, and the general thread of dialogue indicated; or that serviceable man of the magazine who indicates what might be written and how illustrated, the poet who produces his unmetrical scheme and tells you to finish it in rhyme and metre. The soul is surely here but as to the rest of it, what matter; hand it over to the imagination.

Passing from the "innocence of eye" of true



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

Impressionism we have at length reached the level of *the innocence of brain* which seems readily to soften to those numerous influences outheld by the imagination.

### IV

Up to the present the real art in painting has rested with greatest force upon the *quality of tone*. The worth in the scales of the collector and the seller of pictures has been determined with greatest attention to that point. Consciously or unconsciously judgment of all ages past and that of the present upon all past ages of painting has found in this the pivot of value. Now tone, with slightly varied interpretation, means one thing to all men. It means color association in all parts of a picture, dominating colors of the picture distributed in lesser degrees of force throughout the work. In short, it is color unity, either of analogous or contrasted harmony, more easily appreciated in a Whistlerian "symphony" than in a full orchestration of color by Rubens, but, nevertheless, the point of effort to all painters and quite as important to Monet as to Dupré or Puvis. By universal agreement the sense of tone is the polar star of the painter. There have been periods when this was wrongly judged as to its importance and those periods have never failed of their snubbing. The draughtsmen of the classic period of David forgot it, the landscape painters of a time previous to this have had it

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

secured to their works by time and varnish, which in consequence now possesses value as painting which is not entirely their own. The chief difference between Raphael and Titian, Delaroche and Delacroix lies just here. The general influence of Ruskin, directing the painter toward truth as all paramount, and with no thought of tone, is accountable for the arid period in English landscape following Turner and for our own Hudson River School. So insistent to the modern mind has the grasp of this commanding idea become, that even Gauguin, who thought to break all conventions, was still, true artist as he was, never dispossessed of this restraint. No more was Lautrec-Toulouse who aimed at the raw essence of things, but was nevertheless a painter; nor indeed any one howsoever stimulated he might be by what he conceived to be the *vital thing* in art. All these have remained painters, loving the surface and steadfast in the quality of it; Bellows, Van Gogh, Cézanne, Glackens, Mark Fisher, Dearth, Weir, Hassam, and the many others who in any degree have embraced the impressionistic formula come together, joining hands upon this line, arranging themselves along the cliff where Matisse has led, and look down to find him at the bottom where he has chosen to go in his escape from the past. His separation from all of these is complete. He frankly chooses not to be a painter. He has ignored the quality of painting. He prefers to be the child in spite of those conditions which strongly demand the mature mind.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

In Matisse therefore we have a man intent on presenting a fundamental, unadorned, undeveloped idea, as a babe in its cradle, asking us to reclaim, clothe, and in time find it companionable, through those *possibilities* which are bound to evolve into completeness.

One may admit reason in the idea, but demand proof of rationality in the means. His efforts, he declares, satisfy him, and also that he would not have different any picture he ever painted. In this he strikes a note of insincerity; for he admits some of his work was so turbulent that he could not bear it on his own wall. A second comes with his reply to the lady who exclaimed: "That self-portrait looks as if it might have been done by your little daughter." "My striving," retorted the painter, "is to see things just as she does."

The *seeing* with the pure and unsullied vision of childhood is a beautiful, and perhaps an interesting, mode, but does this purity of vision entail the *immaturity of its expression, which belongs to childhood?*

The *seeing* eye is *not* the intuitive eye; it is the eye of *experience*. The difference in the work of a student during the first season out of doors and the third is not one of eyes, but of plain utility in the employment of his vision. The universal law of development has been expressed by one of the wise men of antiquity: "When I became a man I put away childish things," and the effort to back away from man's estate and recoil from its obligations, seeking absolutism for incompetency of expression beneath

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

the shelter of the primitive vision of childhood is unmanly.

The assumption in defending the "movement" from this aspersion is that the windows of childhood open to the purest vistas, exposing the most adequate means for the expression of ideas and emotions, and altogether the most worthy to offer the vast majority of mankind to whom art appeals. Whether the child be one in years, or merely childish in his capacity for form expression, this condition is frankly preferred by the votaries of the new school to that condition of maturity enabling man to both conceive a subject with judgment and express it with adequacy.

Jacob Epstein might well be asked why his statue of Euphemia is more of a Euphemia by turning her toes out at an angle of 180 degrees, a feat which cannot be accomplished without falling, or why a woman with plump cheeks and a staunch neck should have wasted to a skeleton at her hips.

Why in the portrait of Père Tanguy, by Van Gogh, does an arm of one half man's length aid our impression of the man, or the placement of the eye, purposely too high. Endless multiplication of such questions must of necessity follow the increasing flux of these enigmas.

If it is not necessary to express the character of a landscape, a human figure, its hands and feet, a silk hat or a tree, why does Matisse fall back on drawing sufficiently to make his self-portrait look like himself and not like some other man or no man! Why, in a word, if his own

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

nose demands a determinate line for its expression, should he deny as expressive a line to any other man for his nose, or why for his foot or his hand. Why in the one case lean on Nature, accepting an intelligent line for her revealing, and in another case refuse the intelligent means for her revealing. If, in the one case, a given line was acknowledged to be right, why in an analogous case should it be regarded wrong by the use of a totally different line, a conclusion determined by the artist's assertion that whatever he had done he was satisfied with. At this point therefore we are approaching close to the area of *whims*: we indeed come near to childhood, and this frankly is the goal of ambition to the Matisse school.

Howsoever willing the mind and catholic the sentiments which one may turn toward this newest conception of art, the questionable-ness of its sincerity evoked by these and countless other like "eccentricities" causes us to place it for some time at least in the "house of detention."

In nine cases out of ten that which we recognize as giving an interest to this work *beyond the childlikeness* is the knowledge of art expressed therein, and which the child has not attained unto.

It is a case of the newcomer in sheep's clothing, we think we see the lamb, and he beneath the disguise wishes us to see just this — the lamb; but he nevertheless on occasions discloses more than lamblike intelligence. And so at first we are bewildered and then

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

sense the deception. The whole is an attempt to bring together two poles which naturally separate toward opposite directions.

That this however has been accomplished with measurable success, some of the great designs of Matisse will attest, for in his effort to give out an idea through a design he has reduced that idea to its simplest expression.

Herein he strikes a chord divested of every extraneous embellishment. It is fundamental and therefore powerful; and the sound of it is lasting because uninterrupted. Additions might prove interesting, but to his mind are unnecessary. Look at his conception of the Dance; awkward, ponderous people disporting themselves with unfeigned abandonment. They move with no especial rhythm, but each animated with an individual sense of pleasure in the exercise. Each is emotional, each expressive of that energy which is stimulated by rhythmic music. There are no accessories, for accessories would not aid the truly fundamental notion of the dance.

Again in his group of three, with a tortoise, this group of three has been put together with a knowledge of the requirements for the best adjustment of that number. Herein the child is clearly outclassed, and knowledge by experience is substituted for childlike intuition. But the primitive sense is introduced in making the outline purposely faulty. The lines of the legs are wrong. The anatomy is uncertain in spots. The longing to accomplish, despite these disabilities however, conquers, and the



HEAD — *Fiebig*



IMPRESSION — *Meeter de Zorn*



LA CRÉOLE AU PERROQUETTE  
*Mérodack-Jeanneau*



UNE TYPE — *Kalus*

VARIED EXAMPLES OF POST IMPRESSIONISM



WAR — *Hansen-Jacobsen*



PANEL — *Tchouyco*

CUBISM. SEE ALSO PICASSO (FACING PAGE 33)



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

group is placed before us in its crude organic lines in such a way as to make us feel the elementalism of the design revealing a primitive idea.

When applied to **D**ecoration one must candidly admit that this archaism contains a charm; for decoration as an art of two dimensions has, in its simplicity, appealed to all primitive peoples, and their designs, if balanced and rhythmic, possess therein the desideratum.

Could one demand a more perfect mode of graphic portrayal for decorative purposes than that employed by Mr. Chanler in his sumptuously colored panels. See "The Stag Hunt," herewith.

But the question naturally arises, could not all the sensation produced by these pictures of Matisse be accomplished with correct though simplified drawing? Matisse declares he draws "emotionally and without the aid of the intelligence." Analyzed, this signifies that the coördination which should exist between his emotions and his means of expression is lacking: his emotion unaided by his intellect is inadequate. In short, he does not know how to draw automatically, intuitively. He has not perchance heard of a method of drawing organized in Philadelphia by C. G. Leland, and further expanded by J. L. Tadd, which develops the faculties of coördination between the brain and the hand. Pupils of this system are able to create marvels in design which are so wonderfully balanced as to give impression of mathematical measurement. In pictorial design the

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

figures are conceived in good proportion, but without detail — men, children, running deer, horses, dogs, etc., are rendered with a swift elementalism which is truly marvellous. It is all a matter of automatic control which, when acquired, gives rein to emotional suggestion in an endless variety of forms.

A few years ago I witnessed a public performance of the most expert students from a class of two thousand from the common schools of Philadelphia. On the stage was one of the most accomplished virtuosos of painting in this country. After watching their swift magic of creation in design and pictorial composition, executed in huge size at arm's length, he turned quickly and asked: "Could you do that?"

"No."

"Nor I! I am going to get a blackboard and *learn how to draw*."

Here then is Matisse wishing to draw emotionally and supposing that this means *clumsily*; a man having a large class of pupils whom he forces to draw academically only to have them forget it all and in time imitate his clumsiness.

What a pity he could not shorten his march around Robin Hood's barn by acquaintance with a system which forestalled his experiments by about twenty years. What a pity that he and others who are attempting emotional drawing by a method which should be dubbed second-childhood art should not know that the horse cannot be taught new tricks, in his maturity, by old rules; but, if at all, only by

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

a logical method starting with that *faculty which has in charge the result.*

No one can successfully coördinate his brain and hand, intuitively, whose life's training has been to acquire knowledge *through his reason.* Yet we see attempts at this by a growing group of Frenchmen, now of the present fashion, some of whom are willing to place their signatures in the corners of these little trifles, and we also see collections of these drawings in all degrees of success and failure hung in some of our academies to the bewilderment of the students who are learning to draw rationally.

Augustus John, quite in sympathy with the new movement, declares, "Matisse has a big idea but cannot yet express it." Will not some one interested in these newer struggles direct attention to such illumination as may be found in "New Methods of Art Education," by J. Liberty Tadd; Orange Judd and Co., New York. Price \$3.00 net.

### V

The Greek mind, the most keen and penetrating of any which has yet turned its insight toward art, believed that the complete physical and mental man at his best was barely adequate to the task of producing worthy art. Their notion of the inner spirit of things was as sagacious and demanding as that of the modern "man with a vision," but in proportion as their vision was clear did they regard imperative the necessity to give it a *man's expression.*

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

The desire of the "new" artist to express the spirit of the subject through an innocence of brain, leaves out of account the fact that the *spirit* naturally prefers to take up its residence in a *completed* not to say a *well-made* temple.

It is no more unreasonable to expect this than to suppose the spirit of God will take up his abode in the heart of man which has been polluted. The Greeks did not expect the essence of wisdom could find expression in a Minerva on whom to look would only be to shudder. While declaring sincerity to be the essence of the new movement, the greatest part of this multiform effort is expressed in various inventions seeking some different mode than is natural to the direct, unaffected, normal estate of manhood.

Elsewhere it has been pointed out in the discussion on Body, Soul, and Spirit which assumes that art, expressive of man, shall represent him in his entirety, that its privilege is to proclaim his trinity.

Complete art recognizes an opportunity in body, in soul, and in spirit. That which has body only, contains scientific truth, the work of a student. Uniting soul with this it becomes individual, both in conception and technique. Advancing into the range of spiritual significance, it sacrifices neither of the preceding qualities, but merely expands from this broadened basis.

Our rating of manhood decides that physique is but one third of the man, use of that physique

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

for labor (physical performance), another third, and an expansion toward mental possibilities, the last division of the tripartite organism.

The latest comers in art discount the physique of art, enfeeble a manly use of that physique to the grade of childhood's capacity, and present the last third for a complete whole. What is the result of a like unsymmetrical development of man himself? Witness it in the high priest of present Pueblo Indians of America, the medicine man of the recent nomadic tribes, or the truly wonderful fakirs of India. Their communion with the spirit-world cannot be obtained through the robust integument of good health. The body must be sacrificed and reduced through vigils and starvation until the spirit can dominate. Thus forced it may find its affinity in the overworld.

But when we set forth to hunt up *a man* we do not pause for one of these specimens of the race.

The balance of power in the empire of art is surely strengthened by this triple alliance. I therefore venture the following two reasons why that which appeals to the great majority of persons practically or sentimentally interested in art, as a storm now menacing its past and present glory, will in due course break and scatter with no other ill effects than the clouding of certain non-essentials in our present art, and with the much desired result of clearing the atmosphere grown dense in an obsession concerning the objective of art.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

In the first place the claim of "sincerity" which is declared to be the heart of the movement is not sincerity. The attention called to this point in their creed cleverly forestalls its denial in an attempt to guard its weakest spot, but it nevertheless must be assumed that any one who willingly adopts the rôle of childhood in both conception and expression is not sincere with himself. His attempted return to childhood involves an avowal of disbelief, not only in his own growth, but in the growth of the race, and in so grave a premise we must detect insincerity. The supposition that the *faith* of little children is a recommendation having to do with mental or physical *capacity* of children is a strange subversion of a palpable truth — namely, that faith has nothing in common with thought, and thought remains even to this present the lever of Archimedes.

Touching this general point M. De Zayas offers an important truth: "The impression caused by form, the conception of it, its interpretation, obeys in every race an inevitable law. The progressive evolution marks the anthropological estate of the races, the representation of form being more intense the more inferior the race is; for it is a principle recognized by psychology that the psychic intensity of the work is in an inverse ratio to the mental state of the individual who produced it, while the <sup>1</sup>artistic comprehension of the indi-

<sup>1</sup>Incidentally this psychic phenomenon is applicable to the general argument of "The Conception of Art" in its emphasis upon "quality."

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

vidual is in direct ratio to the degree of civilization.

“From this we conclude that those who imitate the work of children produce childish work but not the work of children.”

In the case of Picasso whose philosophy is an ingenuous, generalized point of view, broad enough to accommodate all the world that prefers symbols to realities, one can but be annoyed by the evident care with which some parts of his symbolized scheme are executed, to a degree beyond any possible necessity of indicating a plane, which is the only important matter, and the free carelessness in which other planes quite as essential are executed. Study the accompanying example entitled “A Woman” (page 33) and perhaps the palpable fumbling and juggling of these mysteries, weighed carefully in the mind, may excite the question; if Picasso were to do another “woman” would he put in all the different touches and smudges just as here presented, and which are so calculated to persuade us that each touch is weighted with thought? If so, and the symbols representing woman have been thus standardized in his system, then must we not have them always so, for since no individual is expressed, we take this to be the generic woman. In his sculpture, where he contends with form in the third dimension and seeks the essential planes, his results have a directness, a force, and in rare cases a beauty unmanifested in his work upon the flat. The suspicion therefore becomes just as sincere as the “sincerity” claimed

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

by the newer cult that much of this evidence of thought and care, the tapping here of the charcoal, the firmer drawing there, the multiplication of edges and the attempt of exquisite shading is but a combination of digital flourishes executed over what is of the real importance, dust blown in the eyes as a last ceremony of mystery over what, to the mind of this particular painter at least no one need deny, has a meaning. It is no part of criticism to challenge what a man does, but there are two points in criticism which every work submits itself to: the first, is the effort sincere, the second, is the expression adequate for the intention.

Admitting that one can be truly sincere in this belief such a one would be found only once in a generation, and takes his place among the "great solitaires." How absurd it would have been to see a group of little people perched upon pillars surrounding Simon Stilites, or to suppose that their purpose could be anything more than to secure some of the echoed glory through imitation.

A second reason for believing that the new movement will never become general is the natural character of the public. The public (and art has always been dependent upon the public in its natural preferences) will in time fall back upon the legitimate æsthetic craving for the thing beautiful.

It may recognize the claims of the spirit, it may indeed take on a conviction that materialism is not reality, that the hidden things are the most worthy and that the suggestion



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

is worth more than the visible and tangible mark, but the public has always been grossly material, at least sufficiently to demand the goods for the money. The idealism of Berkeley is not a popular philosophy, and to many an absent treatment is not effective and convincing. The public, in short, will have realities, the public will foster traditions, the public retains that same childlike intuitive sense, so lauded by the new movement, that will make it cling to what successive ages by agreement have pronounced both good and great. If art is to change it will never be by revolution of the summersault, but by reason of a sane tendency through evolution. The subversive thing may gain a place side by side with the art of the ages and will appeal to its own type of mind. The man who likes that sort of a thing will be happy in finding it just that sort of a thing which his sort of man will like; and again, there will doubtless be found those who, still satisfied by traditional art, may yet broadly open their hearts to results which are discovered in these attempts to speak through the spirit of art, and who are frankly able to see the good in varied approaches to the great source thereof.

Such a movement gaining momentum with a rapidity never before equalled and having as its allies both the newer music and the newer literature will by very force of numbers impel its invasion and command its territory.

The literature and music of this movement lag in no whit behind its painting and sculpture.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

The *Salon d' Automne* likewise throws its mantle over these.

### VI

In Picasso and his principles it would seem the *ne plus ultra* had been reached, for in his case it is not with the matter but with the manner that he is completely engrossed. Herein therefore his contemplation is entirely that of an artist. It is the artist's labor to extract the essence from his subject and reveal what he finds it to be. Herein also lies the range of art opening to different individuals.

To one the subject is expressed through externals, to another through a suggestion of the subject's characteristics, to another through the spiritual element clearly controlling the physical, to Picasso through an abstract sensation which in his peculiar mental workshop is turned out through geometric figures, and to his mind these concatenations of cubes, triangles, and parallelograms are expressive of the essential characteristics of his subject. Whether a committee of alienists would report with a clean bill of health is not so much the question as to know whether his mind can find anywhere in the world its affinity, any who can honestly follow this lead and arrive at his conclusions. To all such, his work should be a pleasure, for almost every point in his creed is a perfectly logical one.

When we look into his *perspective*, however, we find it can have no place in any logical scheme. He justifies this act of representing the child as smaller than the adult, no matter

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

where placed in perspective, by the assertion that form has intrinsic but not relative value with regard to other forms. The child in the foreground is therefore always smaller than the parent one, two, or three hundred yards away. Very good, if you insist; but what shall be done in the case of objects of like size as to foreground and background? Why, if a visual art is to become the base for psychological expression should it fail us *in respect of vision*. One should not fall out with his terms, having *assumed* them, and this conflict with natural fact with respect to him who defies nature leaves such a one in the position of Canute, inside the surf line.

As to colour, the same assertion denies to it any existence. What is of much greater appeal to Picasso is vibration of light, which to his mind is more productive of sensation.

His art is therefore an appeal to the psychology of man by means of his own particular code of signs and symbols. Conceiving form as a matter of surfaces he creates these by a series of equivalents. *Æsthetics* being entirely dismissed and the address made wholly to the psychological faculty, one might properly ask why, with a code established and understood, it would not be as well to simplify still further, and have  $x$  represent a head and  $y$  a hand, and  $m$  the feet,  $a$ ,  $b$ , and  $c$  respectively land, water, sky, etc. There being no relativity in art it would not matter how these signs were thrown together. To the knowing it could soon be understood whether the artist wished to call

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

up an impression of a young lady taking a walk with her dog or a peasant returning home in his cart, a man and his wife sitting by the fire or lovers walking by the shore. This would frankly place us back in the era of sign language, which, if approved by the majority, would be a proof to the majority that progress out of that condition had been a mistake, and degeneration the path of true wisdom.

### VII

The impressions made of New York by M. François Picabia to the order of the *New York Tribune* brings this theory to a focus and has enabled one to include its rating in the intense question: Does this art appeal *to me*?

The subjects decided upon were Skyscrapers, Peacock Alley, and Fifth Avenue at Thirty-fourth Street.

The results lacked even the remotest objective significance, and it is possible in a few years, when the New York experience is forgotten, the author of them may find himself in the case of Browning when confronted with some of his own lines. To know which is which may embarrass this exponent of Cubism.

But, it is explained by M. Picabia, that his result was a picture of his own mental mood, created upon approaching these subjects. Yet as one gazes upon the picture of the mental mood of this man, intelligible to himself alone and impossible to any other one in the world, he rightly demands, "of what concern is *his*

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

mood to me, especially if he cannot communicate it!" "Art is the ability of man to *pass on* his emotion to another," and if Tolstoy had attempted no other proposition than this, its thorough proof by him entitles him to a place among the art philosophers.<sup>1</sup>

The amusement which the baby obtains in making marks and mounds in the sand, which he tells us represent houses, roads, men, trees, and the like is of an interest to us commensurate with our interest in the child's imagination. If he continues to create these symbols and insist upon them at seven or eight we send him to the school for Feeble Minded Children. If in mature life he insists, the Asylum doors open.

Yet what injustice. These institutions include many well-educated individuals whose only wrong has been that they were symbolists. They make one thing and insist that it means another. Numbers of them can doubtless bring proof from Socrates through Plato that they are right in their point of view. The only reason for their detention is that, in their insistence upon these things, their relatives become bored — a wholly insufficient argument and one which for them must become a mockery, if perchance the drawings alluded to and published by the New York *Tribune* should come to their scrutiny.

Nay, truly, art is free, and should be, but why *exempt*? What of these others restrained and in bonds — aye, what of them?

<sup>1</sup>"The starting point of genius is original discovery: the second step is its interpretation to the world."—*John C. Van Dyck*.

## CHAPTER XIII

### FUTURISM — THE FINAL DEVELOPMENT

“They assume an epoch.” — *James Huneker.*

TO KEEP pace with the eager enthusiasm of developing artistic thought in these latter days is fraught with discouragement. No sooner have we made our plunge into the thought wave of one approaching sea than another is beheld. To add to the perplexities of the tossing and many centred turbulence, yet another is about to break upon us which in the course of events was destined for a latter day, but which in the anxiety and impatience of its discoverers has been pushed forward, and is now resounding upon the shore line of art's farthest promontories. The name it bears suggests that when it has expanded upon the entire coast it will be here to stay. Indeed, one may find scattered upon the sands the forewords of its creed. We examine and find its pronouncements stated in a clear and strident tone.

One reads and queries:

#### THE FUTURISTES' CREED

1. “*We contend that every form of imitation must be scorned, and that every form of originality must be glorified.*” At once we wish to have a

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

definition for imitation. But proceeding we get the notion that this signifies reality.

Why then do the newcomers make the face of a woman like the face of a woman; why not like that of a child, or perhaps a man? This would certainly show scorn for imitation. How much better a caricature of a man than the Apollo Belvedere!

*"Every form of originality must be glorified."* Art in the future is to be placed on the basis of the labor union; a reward, and what's more a "glorified" one, for any kind of work.

2. *"That we must break away from the bondage of 'harmony' and 'good taste,' overelastic terms with which one could easily condemn any of Rembrandt's, Goya's, or Rodin's works."*

Rembrandt and Goya cannot reply, but Rodin might yet be asked if he thought his works required the defence here offered against *good taste* and *harmony* which it is implied they violate.

3. *"That art critics are useless, if not harmful."*

Suppose they agreed with the Futuristes' creed, how then would "3" read? Critics are "useless" when they fail to defend art, and usually "harmful" to the enemy thereof.

4. *"That we must make a clean sweep of all hackneyed subjects, and express henceforth the whirlwind life of our day, dominated by steel, egotism, feverish activity, and speed."*

Why fall out with a subject? Originality is more surely proved by exploiting an old subject in a new way than by hunting up a virgin subject. We cannot demand a new Bible, but

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

nevertheless long for original conceptions from the pulpit, based upon the old. Art has nothing to do with subject; art is expression. Art is universal; it knows neither nationality nor period, neither yesterday nor to-day. That art must "illustrate" a period and that period the present is to tie art up to the fashion magazine and the daily newspaper. Why, forsooth, the "whirlwind life" of to-day, why of steel, egotism, feverishness, or speed? These promoters of a new art creed must have submitted drawings to a yellow journal and had a heart to heart talk with the art editor. Art is a few sizes larger than this. It sometimes exploits "repose," for instance.

5. *"That we must prize highly the title of 'cranks,' that gag applied by Philistines to the lips of innovators."*

Words of true policy if not wisdom. Nothing better to an assured success than the accompaniment of martyrdom for any new ism.

6. *"That complementary subjects and colors are as absolutely necessary in painting as blank verse is in poetry and polyphony in music."*

No one objects.

7. *"That the universal dynamism must be rendered through canvases producing dynamic sensation."*

Fine! Dynamic sensation is just what all art wants; but what is this brand of universal dynamism? Who makes it; who holds its patent?

8. *"That nature must be interpreted with a sincere and virgin mind."*



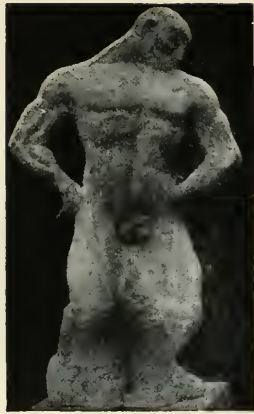


FUNERAL OF THE ANARCHIST, GALLI — *Carra*



THE REVOLT — *Rossolo*

FUTURISM



LATEST TENDENCY  
*Merodack-Jeancau*



JEANNE D'ARC — *Frémier*



LORENZO DE MEDICIS  
*Michael Angelo*



THALIA — *Greek*



MEMNON — *Egyptian*



EARLY ETRUSCAN

RETROSPECTION

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

What, ho! The trouble up to date was supposed to be that nature had been so interpreted.

9. "*That motion and light destroy the concrete aspect of objects.*

Neither proposition is true, but if believed to be by the Futuriste, the inevitable should take place. He should forthwith withdraw from art and try something easier.

The reverse of the shield reads thus:

*"We disapprove:*

1. "*Of the bituminous tint by which painters try to impart to modern canvas the patina of age.*"

No one tries to make a new picture look like an old one except the dealer in fakes and those he employs.

2. "*Of the superficial and primitive archaism which uses absolute colors and which in its imitation of the Egyptian's linear drawings reduces painting to a childish and ridiculous synthesis.*"

Besides its fling at Post Impressionism, this is an honest attempt perhaps at falling in with No. 8 of the "creed"; *seeing Nature with a sincere and virgin mind.*

3. "*Of the progressive pretence of the 'Secessionists' and 'Independents' who have intrenched themselves behind academic rules as platitudinous and conservative as those of the old academies.*"

The "Secessionists" and "Independents" have been going just a trifle longer than the latest development of originality — long enough to have learned that the pricks they kicked against were not broken by the contact but

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

kept on remaining the foreguard to the chariot. Art, like everything else which is evolved, has laws of being — everything else save anarchy.

4. *“Of the nude in painting, as nauseating and cloying as adultery in fiction.”*

Too much of any good thing seems good for nothing. The bad taste in the mouth the day after proves the man a glutton, not that the meat, wine, and cigars were not good.

At long intervals it becomes possible in the average of chances for a small boy to push his face into a group of older boys and after calling them all fools and liars obtain immunity through the admirable nerve and bravado of the undertaking. It is in some such spirit as this that we loosen up the circle and let the new one in. He is at least amusing, he is intense, he is self-confident, but is too immature to know whether he believes in himself or not; yet we stretch a point and for the moment strive to believe with him that he does. There are several reasons why he should be humored, and the cat too, in her solicitous care for the mouse which she would keep alive, suggests still another.

Though his creed does not make good literature it is rather through the lack of education and general mental poise and literary endowment that it stands forth as a bundle of mental fallacies or platitudes, than that the real intention of the spirit behind the creed is shallow. Indeed, the performance is in quite a different

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

class. This at least awakens an interest not founded on humor, and we quickly resolve, on approaching some products of the creed of the Futurist, that we would rather *see than read him*.

The arrival at this is in the course of most natural procedure, and on second thought no one need be surprised at the bombshell nor give more than ordinary credit for any originality in its device.

We have come to this simply because we are at the end of the road and there was no other turn. To the makers of new sensations, an occupation with which the stimulated brain of the Romance nations is ever amusing itself, the putting of two pictures **upon** one canvas was, all things considered, not a very original diversion. Photography has been exploiting it for some time, and were the American genius out for this sort of sensation it would have appealed long since to the keen Yankee mind. The fact is the Yankee does not yet feel that he has reached the end of his road, and, moreover, a large part of his sagacity lies in keeping this open. The fact that in literature, painting, music, and sculpture American and English art has been practically uninfluenced by "Primitivoly" and "Savageopathy" is evidence that these nations are ascending instead of descending. Our ambition is beyond, *in this same direction* — we have not yet reached our perihelion but are persisting in our orbit, as yet dissatisfied with accomplishment of what is at hand and reaching toward the fuller illumina-

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

tion of it, which we know must lie beyond. To us therefore neither Post Impressionism nor Futurism appeals as a necessity but rather as a point of view which we may indulge and even patronize in very much the spirit of the Romans of the Colosseum. Nor would it be either true or gracious to deny that the game gives us genuine pleasure, mingled it is true with the grip of tension, despair, and distrust, yet beheld by all of open mind as having somewhere at its base a reason which is sufficient for its creation.

### II

To my own mind the Futuristes are decidedly more inspiring than the Post and Neo-Impressionists, and pictures by them would doubtless prove an endless source upon which to practise the fascinating ingenuities of the imagination.

Their attempt in brief is to present successive events as simultaneous. A street scene is not such as may be made with an instantaneous exposure in photography but rather by uncapping the lens at intervals to receive superimposed impressions. We may see the same character several times in the same picture: coming down the street, ascending the stairs, and entering the room.

The qualities arising out of *suggestion*, *intimation*, and *inference*, which are so subtly applied in literature, sculpture and painting, are in this art of the future substituted for actualities. These, besides interfering with the main proj-

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

ect, fail to align themselves in the natural course of sequence and in the scheme of events are as likely to be taken upside down as right side up, hind side fore as in the rational course of events, and though it is possible to select from the mass of material dumped at our feet such as may be constructed into logical inferences, it must be remembered that there is but a certain proportion of the race that is able to entertain and comment upon two or more ideas presented at the same time.

Up to this point in history the boundaries of the fine arts have been as fixed as those of the United States or the coast line of England. If there ever had existed any doubt concerning the territory claimed by painting and literature, Lessing's "Laocoon" sought to establish them. In this exhaustive comparison between the capacities of poetry and painting it is proved that poetry deals with successive impressions, and painting with simultaneous impressions. This limitation of painting necessitates, therefore, such selection as will make the most of a limited opportunity. Painting must determine the "fertile moment," and must so order her resources that the greatest possible sensation may result from her material.

The Futuristes have now invaded the realm of successive impression thus far conceded to literature. And why, shall we not ask, may not this be done? If painting is able to strengthen the sensation for which her forms exist there is no understanding with literature forbidding her attempt. There is no proof of

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

authority to Lessing, Winkelmann, or Goethe for fixing the capacity of graphic activity. Let Pragmatism here have its chance. That thing is good which proves itself, and there are certain subjects open to art wherein more of their character may be evoked by such means than by the simultaneous method; in all subjects of naturally chaotic character, such as battles, street scenes, interiors where the company is constantly moving, subjects of the dance, games, the action of horses, etc. In all such cases the new movement may be able to supply as true if not a truer sensation of reality than by our conventional means. To rightly cajole the visual sense, coaxing it from rebellion, is no easy task, but demands an ability to draw and to paint such as will put this art technically to the strictest test, and call for highly trained performances. Herein will come a blessed relief from the shallow prosecutions of crude color and cruder draughtsmanship of the imitators of Matisse.

The assertion, however, that this is to become the art of the future is on a par with declaring that in the future the only drink for mankind will be a certain brand of champagne, or other wine warranted to make men see double.

The liberal acceptance during the past decade of the many isms which art has proposed should be proof to all new cults that no one can dominate to the exclusion of the others, but that each must prove its right to live before the tribunal of a universal intelligence.



## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

### III

The artist has always held the mirror up to nature; the difference in the art of the world has been a difference in mirrors, nature serving each with her unchangeable pose. In Greek art she was reflected from the perfectly polished silver surface of the classic disc which was placed before her, and the response she made was flawless. We are absorbed by the creation and are not reminded of the creator, save in our afterthought. The *perfect* mirror never reminds us of itself.<sup>1</sup>

But after the Greeks, other painters have also polished mirrors, though not as well, and so we have been conscious of the surface, and finding the surface have recalled the artificer. But therein we have discovered a double interest, we have thought of the man with the mirror, pounding out his surface, putting himself into its fibre and polishing it to his notion of fitness. We have at first perhaps been irritated by the unevennesses. When we looked for perfection we have found but analogies; what we thought was a counterfeit of reality was but a suggestion

<sup>1</sup>We might marvel now, as no doubt our fathers did, at the inventor of the camera when first reviewing its results; but science we quickly take for granted as a record in the discovery of things which have always existed. We do not stop to-day to think of Daguerre and thank him for the kodak picture, or Lumière when enjoying the color print of figure or landscape. Phidias and Scopas we honor because their names are attached to a few specific things; and Zeuxis and Apelles we hold in honor by a reputation for the *flawless reflection* known to us through the comments of their contemporaries. It is not likely that any of them painted any better than Mr. B., the still life painter, or M. Bouguereau, both of whom the world is now cruelly trying to forget.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

of it. Some mirrors were so rudely fashioned as to be no better than the reflection, refracted and broken, of troubled water, the facets so sharply bent as to act like prisms, flashing the rainbow colors. Again the mirror has been hammered out in large planes so that the image comes to us in cubes, parallelopipedons, triangles, bent, twisted and contorted. We scowl at such a one, dividing nature into elemental fragments. We think hard thoughts of him, willing to inflict us with his careless craftsmanship. We exclaim, "What childish effort at mirror making!" And when he declares he could make a better one but does not want to, we jeer the more and question his motives, his ability, and even his sanity.

Finally, we find the mirror has been etched upon, it bears suggestions here and there which we cannot but see while absorbed with the mirror's reflection. Instead of a singled thought, two, three or more are suggested. It seems as though the mirror had been quite defaced, but as we withdraw and go our way the impression we carry with us is the impression of reality.

## CHAPTER XIV

### CONCLUSION

“Life is short, art long, opportunity fleeting, experiment slippery, judgment difficult.” — *Epictetus*.

JUDGMENT of art is difficult in that ratio which measures not alone our ignorance but our lack of sympathy and our lack of proportion. Were the subject in hand a science, the study of that science would in time render us expert, but no amount of knowledge of the fine arts ever made one a competent critic of art any more than a knowledge of the world's religions would enable one to apprehend the *essence* of religion. In both art and religion the discernment of the spirit is what counts; and the spirit must be spiritually discerned. It is for lack of this that we are constantly applying the wrong formulas. We use our own creed to measure the other man's.

The new dogma is supposedly vicious because it seems to upset our own. Both artists and critics rush to the rescue of what they think is right by fighting what they imagine is wrong; frequently without investigation and on the general premise that man is as capable of folly as of wisdom. To save tradition has been the first and last reason for the greatest conflicts of the ages.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

Tradition never needed saving: it somehow has a way of looking out for itself, and if it has not the seeds of perennial generation it had better die. The greatest fools of history are those who have not believed this; those who have assumed that the way of their present was right, and resented interference.

To-day Art is in the whirlpool; the tumult of the waters are about her. She has no sooner escaped the Charybdean suction than she is threatened by the more awful fate of the daughters of Cratæsis. Many are the shouts of caution, awful the moments of suspense; but ye in charge of Art's true destiny spare the gag law at least. Again history stands ready to prove that this has always meant galvanic batteries and blood transfusion to the oppressed. The cause that is not proven by martyrdom lacks the best species of advertisement.

This the opposition is insisting to supply. Instead, a better policy would be to play out the tether cheerfully and grant all possible rope for the hanging. This would be both sportsmanlike — and sagacious.

The craft of art weathered the Impressionistic squall a generation ago, and the drenching she received only stiffened her sails so that to-day she rides better than ever.

Post Impressionism is but a relapse which when spent will doubtless give Art the regular "added lease of life," passing forth as she is bound to from the fever of the present. Through anxiety that the currents which now are dividing will not eventually merge, the presumption

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

obtains that Art may be two things and not one, that the definition must be changed to accommodate a changed significance. Art frequently has been wrongly interpreted both at the hands of philosophers and artists, and set to performing feats which by her nature were impossible.

While being the cause for the total confusion of many a one, the newer creed of Post Impressionism need only be found to apply to Post Impressionism instead of to Art in general, and there will be no more reason for fighting her than for a Baptist to wage war upon a Methodist.

What says the creed of these two distinctive arts? In brief, one wishes to create a mental mood under the spell of which the mind may be stimulated to a new creating; the other offers the compass of that stimulation and assumes responsibility for its dimensions, which may be measured.

Is there anything incongruous in the same mind accepting these two separate kinds of stimulation! Because the barbaric color and crude forms of Matisse stir the somnolent primitive microbe which still lingers with some of us, must he therefore straightway cast out Alma Tadema or John Sargent who substitute the *visual* for the *mental* picture. Should a man be accused of treachery who would keep an example of each sort of art under one roof — duly provided with separate chambers?

If there be conflict, the cause is the old story, the story of "one way."

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

Coventry Patmore longs for the formation of what he calls "Institutes of Art which would supersede and extinguish nearly all the desultory chatter which now passes for criticism, and which would go far to form a true and abiding popular taste."

This would be all very well, compiled, as he suggests, "from the writings of Aristotle, Goethe, Hegel, and others" who have crystallized in words the practice of artists. As these principles, however, have invariably followed Art's expressions rather than preceded it and are necessarily the discoverable essence of its life, it would fall out that a brand new sort of art would demand at least one or two new principles. Some of the old would stand, it is true, in any change, but nothing of the hard and fast sort can bind *art*, which is broadly an expression of that power in man which is regulative of the quality of all that he creates for his æsthetic and intellectual pleasure. What these pleasures may be in one age and another are controvertible; but Art's business is wholly to see to the *quality* of that which is created for this pleasure.

With this gauge we may not only estimate *Art* but the age as well. We may justly conclude that the art of the dark ages was sufficient to give pleasure to the beclouded intelligence of that age and with the same process of reasoning, without recourse to its philosophy or poetry, may get in touch with the keener civilization which prevailed in the Greece of Pericles. The intellectual calmness of Egypt, the spiritual

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

contemplation of the Orient betokened that trend of intellectual reach, together with its limitations, the pleasure in which has been proclaimed in their art. As a man thinketh so is he; and so we may apprehend the intellectual joy of both the painters and beholders of the early religious art, regarding the altar pieces which, through a fervent realism, strove to express the spirituality of their ideal. With most of them the spirit was the directing force. No one can gaze on the early art of the Renaissance, from Giotto to Fra Angelico and Fra Bartolomeo and not be arrested and held in thrall by that sanctified intellectual approach which gave them birth.

This same criterion must absolutely apply to-day. Our civilization is many sizes larger than aforesaid. It is inventive and furtively seeks new modes with incessant unrest. Art should be lenient, ready, and even anxious to put her arm about the shoulders of any new creed which can prove its case, and with the adoption remind it that the newcomer is but one of many of an endless chain and in no wise can take the place of any other.

“Before my tale of days is told,  
O may I watch, on reverent knees,  
The ‘Unknown Beauty’ once unfold  
The magic of her mysteries!

. . . . .

“New arts, new raptures, new desires  
Will stir the new-born souls of men;  
New fingers smite new-fashioned lyres —  
And O, may I be listening then.

## THE CONCEPTION OF ART

“ Shall I reject the green and rose  
Of opals with their shifting flame,  
Because the classic diamond glows  
With lustre that is still the same?

“ Change is the pulse of life on earth;  
The artist dies, but Art lives on.  
New rhapsodies are ripe for birth  
When every rhapsodist seems gone.

“ So to my day's extremity,  
May I in patience infinite  
Attend the beauty that must be  
And, though it slay me, welcome it.”  
— *Edmund Gosse, closing his last book of poems.*

THE END









UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

Los Angeles

This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

JAN 27 1960

MAR 27 1961

JUL 26 1962

APR 23 1962

MAY 15 1962

JUNE 1962

RECEIVED

MAR 7 1986

CIRC. DEPT. U.I.L.

RECEIVED  
 MAIN LOAN DESK  
 APR 12  
 APR 10 1965  
 A.M. P.M.  
 7 8 9 10 11 12 P 1 2 3 4 5 6

REC'D LD-UR

OCT 23 1979

REC'D LD-UR  
 LU  
 MAR 11 1986

MAR 7 1986



3 1158 01080 8177

N 7425, p79c

CALL NUMBER

SER VOL PT COP

AUTHOR

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE  
THIS BOOK CARD



University Research Library



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54  
BM L 50202

